A-MA

ALCHEMY OF LOVE

Nataša Pantović

Art of eLements

AoL Mindfulness Book #1

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...by plunging into the depths of the mind, for which there is no great need to open the eyes to the sky, to raise the hands, to direct the steps to the temple, nor sing to the ears of statues in order to be the better heard, but to come into the inner self believing that, God is near, present and within, more fully than man himself, being soul of souls, life of lives, essence of essences: for that which you see above or below, or round about, or however you please to say it, of the stars, are bodies, are created things, similar to this globe on which we are, and in which the divinity is present neither more nor less than he is in this globe of ours or in ourselves.

Giordano Bruno

Playing the Glass Bead Game with Pythagoras

If history is a story, then whose story becomes history?

"A witch, that's what she is!"

Whispers disturbed the building silence netting frames of ghastly images on the streets of Macao.

"What do you mean WITCH?" that is Ama! "They've arrested Ama!"

This little commotion of confused words, unsettled thoughts and scattered feelings has happened on the streets of Macao in China, sometime in the mid-17th century, during the Age that is now known as the one of Reason.

Two shadows, deeply moved, connected in an invisible hug, rushed through the night, merging their forms with the moonlight shadows of buildings and trees.

"Just after the death of her father..."

"That retched soul, Fra Thomas, couldn't let her be..."

"Was he the one to arrest Ama?" stuttered the ghostly figure.

"Arrest?!?

“That is absurd!” The second man shook his head with the most sincere and spontaneous gesture of anger.

“Wasn’t her father the founder of the Church and the Uni? They printed books?”

“We must send an urgent message to…, influential..., they would not let this happen...” Words got lost in the wind.

“When did it happen?” Just a whisper, his voice like a bird shot through the wing could not rise.

A family of bats hung upside down observed the scene. They formed a shape of a butterfly carved in rare white jade, the mother whispered silently to her lover: ”let us sleep, it is that time of the day...” Trusting her fate to her new just found friend, balancing in mid-air, she opened her eyes and instinctively moved closer to the fire to hear this story, for a story-teller of the bats she was, so she was curious.

Illuminated, in the starlight, their faces narrated an excitement for the tale that is about to begin.

"Together, harmoniously, all the bodies gathered wood for the fire, lit it, and let it glow through the night of dancing sadness beneath the stars" — a dance choreographed by moonlight a thousand years ago. A shimmering halo, like golden desert sand,

reflected the past, present, and future — an oracle of thoughts burned in the fire at that very momen..

"Last night! If it happened to her, it can happen to any one of us!" Like the doctor who can treat no more patients in the tropical heat, the tone of his voice was hopelessness.

"Does Ruben know?"

"Ruben? Ruben is nowhere to be found, lost, gone..." Like the joker who has finally seen his true role in the pack, his body hesitated.

"What do you mean gone? Maybe the same people killed him?"

"To call infinity a number," the bat contemplated "does not make it one."

They were a restless crowd before they were fed and entertained by spirits, and later, surrounded only by birds, after their fears had been lessened. It takes no reading of the stars to see that the men were friends with Ama. Free from death, for one immortal moment, they sealed their destiny in the totality of Now. On the other hand, for the Lord of Death, nothing was too soon or too late, for each soul that has attracted his grasp, only knew about "too late".

"No, no! The two are not related. He left the Monastery, went into seclusion, and has now disappeared when we need him most!" The leper's

loss of sensation was evident in his confusion. "What bad timing, it is now that Ama needs him the most... "

For several heartbeats, they just stared at each other, realizing how tricky some of their games had been — escaping, just in time, the bad ending. Time spiralled like a blazing comet, from past to future, across the canvases of their lives, drawn by ants, insects, and bees during the span of a single lifetime, all with complete focus on a detail called Destiny.

Suspended mid-air in a yoga pose, they executed wonders, diving into a brief, spontaneous dance. The bat chuckled to herself, echoing the movement of the stars. Barefoot, through the woods, to the sea, where it was deep and calm, she listened to the sound of AuM, altered by grasshoppers and frogs. Gathering fruits, berries, and healing herbs, she shared her offering with her lover, the forest fairies, and other restless spirits.

"Fra Tomas is a crook! He is a haunted soul! He hated both of them."

Countless unspoken words — fear, confusion, and disbelief — formed a thick wall of silence that lasted for what felt like an eternity. Then, the sound of a bird or the wind blowing gently broke the stillness, sparking the conversation once more. "Ama's Chinese friends will not let this happen..." Aware of the stupidity of their errand to let her be arrested,

half in, half out, of the swampy water, unable to move, we all heard his lingering unspecified hope.

"Time to act, every second counts..."

"No time left to waste." Both the Portuguese expatriate and the Chinese man lived their lives with the constant possibility of change. "To accuse a woman of being a witch, an inquisitor needs only two witnesses."

"They easily invent the two! Any conflict of ideas, viewpoints, and perspectives is used."

"The confession is forced out of the accused."

"By nails and needles." The question raised is whether the ends justify the means. Despite his dislike for authority, his mind remained shaped by the values of his time and class. "I've seen neighbours accusing each other, identifying relatives or close friends, burning the innocent, and often the whole scary witchcraft story was based on the fanciful accusations of scared children."

"Children, they use children as witnesses…"

"Ama would have never confessed to such a ridiculous thing!"

"In such circumstances, it is easy to force anybody to confess anything. "

"Obsessive priests can't give judgments..."

"confess anything…" Echoed the fear that clung to their shadow on the wall.

"I pray we never come to the moment of trial and notorious enquiries."

"We don't usually speak of this, but pricking the bodies with needles to find a spot made by the Devil — insensitive to pain — is the procedure." His opinions were shaped by inner pressures marked by an oddity that left a distinctive imprint on everything he said. Divided loyalties, our loneliness causes the imaginative prejudices to shape conclusions. The Portugal that had created him, belonged to the age of Empire, was now betraying him.

"Do you remember those horrid jail chamber chairs?"

"Did he take her to the chamber?"

"Full of spikes, I'm telling you! I've seen them many times back in Europe. Poor women either die during the torture or confess anything to the confessor." Even just a thought of such horrors left a permanent imprint on the impersonal strata of our psyche. "Enough, enough, that won't happen."

"I'll forget all of this. Oh, it won't be long." I thought. "I am a free man now. I'll soon be gone. China, new continent, leaving it all behind. But the

thoughts had kept haunting me. My friends deserve my loyalty, they deserve the truth!”

“That is ridiculous!“

“How barbaric can a man be! We are in China!”

“These horrors happen in the main-land, Europe, not here!”

“The Chinese wouldn’t mass murder their sisters and wives to eradicate flying monsters that supposedly devour children.”

“They are too scared of the spirits of the dead, and too civilised to even dream out loud such a nonsense.”

“We must help her... We have to act...”

“Fra Thomas is crazy...”

“…you never know what he might do next, can we call Father Benedict?”

“He was arrested too...”

“Arrested? For Christ’s sake! To arrest an old wise man? This won’t come to any good!”

Stalagmites meet stalactites, inside the caves of the Tibetan or Serbian or Ancient Greek's Mountain ranges were the same in China.

The dark marble with no artificial light, avatars of metamorphosis, invite only the bravest, with the purest of the hearts, for the others choke within own fears.

Plunging deeper in, all myths became reality, all forms divine, inviting Bronze Age rituals of singing, dancing, praying.

Deep inside caves, within the Goddess’s womb itself — whether in the Maltese Hypogeum or the Ethiopian catacombs — with no air, the pulse quickening, drumming, praying, chanting, further opening, further transforming, shifting from Yang to Yin states of consciousness. This is the same state achieved by Orthodox Christian priests in mountain monasteries, by yogis in India, New Zealand Māori, Arabic Sufi meditators, Kenyan Maasai hunters, and Australian Aborigines living in the desert.

Personally, at the stage of life, when I learned to pass through the Universal black hole, transcending into different states of consciousness, with a stone in my hands, rubbing it gently, multiplying the light, singing Kirya Si, AuM Marija, Kirya DŽ, Shiva Shambo Shakti Shambo, voices wheedled, the moment stopped, the story teller became real -

One camel paced meditatively through the desert sand was totally indifferent towards the goddess story about to be born...

A long, long time ago, somewhere in the higher altitudes of Europe, the ancestor's spirits and Goddess were allowed no more. No Lady Moon, no Shakti dance, no supreme Taoist exchange of Love, no Bull worship, no scripts to share, no music, no art, no Cobras stare, for 2,000 years the women were put to shame.. A shop cat yawned, cats were allowed, as long as they are not black!

Remember, Ama's head was always held high, her face illuminated by the glow of the sunset. A-Ma carved a sacred mantra into the stones, like the ones you find in Tibet or Nepal.

"If history is a story, then whose story becomes the history?" Asked a man calling himself Pythagoras, guiding his camel through the sand dunes.

A striking woman, her 17th-century Chinese attire is juxtaposed with African accessories, giving her an eclectic and timeless look. Her features are sharp, her eyes filled with a quiet wisdom. She has an air of mystery, as if she carries the weight of the world on her shoulders, yet there's a lightness to her spirit when she's in moments of peace or with loved ones.

"Shame! Shame!"

"Not in here though, not in Macao..."

As a conscious researcher, you may wish to investigate further the atrocity of this witch hunt or examine the madness of some Church officials during these times. In our own research, we came across an official record naming 100,000 women, each with a name and birthplace, who were killed during these proceedings. One hundred thousand women, each with a name, from a time long past, inevitably becomes a terrifying number when we consider the millions more who went unrecorded—too poor to be noticed, too innocent to be acknowledged. This number is confirmed in the unofficial rumours of the sane, passed down through the centuries.

"How the hell had it all begun?" Asked a teenage bat with the personality of a leader.

"Stop swearing!" Reminded him his mum.

"How did it happen?" Repeated his sister, for the young one was now sulking, living in shadows of his own psychological making.

"If you get angry, you are sure to make the wrong decisions!" Tormented by the boredom, throughout his young life, his instability of temperament had manifested an intricate web of action and concealment resulting in a broken glass and much screaming. For his age this was not so unusual, so mum has just ignored it.

"Hunted by the dogs of own desires and kept awake by his sinful thoughts, Pope Innocent VIII decided to blame his sleepless nights on spells and folk magic. He punished all the followers of Mother Earth, Devil worshipers, nurses healing the sick with herbs, single widowed women seducing men in their dreams, the village youth, and, of course, the daughters of wealthy merchants — whose fathers were now to be blackmailed." The mum Bat has researched this story carefully.

"Supported by Malleus Maleficarum's Witches' Hammer, a wicked book created by the two German Dominicans in their blind madness, the Inquisition now have had all the power to act against this so-called evil – they had their hunting manual!"

Since there is a God, humanity is implicated in some terrible calamity. This sense of catastrophe, in which all of mankind is involved, shaped the psyche of the Age of Enlightenment.

"Having sold more copies than the Bible, making it the best-selling book of the Middle Ages, it was printed and reprinted countless times in the centuries that followed. This legal manual for slaughter and torture became the fuel for the witch-hunting craze." Mum bat was now hugging the little one, and in this warm gesture, the divided self was expressed: this child was more important than an entire universe. "All the great philosophers used the intuition in their work."

"Do you think that Ama will implore this "intuition" to solve this imprisonment puzzle?" Asked the most curious one.

"Passed from hand to hand,' continued the Storyteller, not allowing these interruptions to break her train of thought. 'Read aloud in churches and village squares, stored in special places alongside the Bible, and consulted in the dark corridors of the torture chambers. The best hunters, as well as children, would know it by heart, reciting it as the deepest wisdom against poor women. WooooW!"

"Reprinted and translated into German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, English, and Portuguese, it outsold all other books except the Bible!" She narrated the story with an inner ear and deep emotion, leaning seductively forward, speaking in a low voice "What is the Bible?"

"Shhh, you are interrupting!"

For the benefit of readers who may not be familiar with the content of this now nearly forgotten book — and without any intention of delving into its cruel and disturbing core — this is simply a glimpse for the historical researcher: "All wickedness, is but little to the wickedness of a woman... " is written in the manual. "What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil nature, painted with fair colours... Women are by

nature instruments of Satan - they are by nature carnal, a structural defect rooted in the original creation. "

"Reason, unfortunately, often leads a human being to own destruction." Pythagoras shiver was felt through the trees.

"No wonder, the mob got fascinated with the idea of witches, flying monsters devouring kids and having secret sexual allegiances with the Devil." The eldest remarked.

"What is secret sexual allegiances with Devil?" The youngest asked, and we all laughed.

"In the middle of the night, they cuddled their kids even closer, as the nights are scary, the peak time for the transformation, ruling the darkness of starry nights: stealing good health, good fortune, poisoning cattle, and destroying crops." Her whisper was deeply musical. Fanatics demanded many drops of Eva's blood... A frenzied revenge for the paradise lost, a sadomasochism that backfired, creating a forest fire that burned thousands, perhaps millions, of trees. It's not until after nine strikes that they are allowed to leave the stable and join the others for a forty-five-minute break, during which they take every opportunity to exercise.

"Like observing sun, moon, stars and planets?" "More or less, just the humans call them: Divine Spirits, Logos, Xristos, Father in the Son and the

Son in the Father…" Repeated mum Bat the words she often heard spoken in Ole.

"The infinite divisibility of the atom with its rapid transformation prevents the Soul from manifesting."

"My Ancient Greece was known as Hellas", told me Pythagoras, showing me an ancient map drawn as the centre of the world, surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea. Malta, South Italy, Crete, Greece, Ancient Europe, the so disputed area of Thrace and Macedonia, Istanbul (later Constantinople) was also a part of this world full of Islands and coastal cities.

At the corner, where Heaven meets the Earth, two mice had a chaise around a slice of bread.

Come closer. Over here is the precious work of art, a bird's nest left abandoned, from the summer three years ago. Still surviving the test of time.

Most of you probably remember this story: year was 1492, his name is Columbus and he was granted, by the King Ferdinand II of Spain, to equip three ships and sail out west into the Atlantic, in search for a western route to the Orient. The Great Admiral of the Ocean Sea Verily, verily, he was called that way, landed in the island of San Salvador, discovering a new continent and with it new tastes, sensations and new thoughts.

Potato and tobacco were brought from America, together with coffee that was brought from Africa, the ritual of smoking and drinking tea and coffee entered our veins. Spices and coffee sneaked into the streets of London and Paris and a first slab of chocolate was on sale in Spain. A completely new set of Gods and Deities marched into our conscious and unconscious sphere, influencing the minds of European philosophers, artists and scientists.

The exploration bug entered our blood, transforming all our maps, our diets and our preferences for clothing. After centuries of isolation, the World looked at us, and we looked at the World, and our eyes finally met, in this glow of self-reflection, doubts and challenges. We needed to share it with others.

During the times of Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael, the time of nude, luscious sculptures and paintings in churches, that surprise visitors even today with their bare boobs, and pronounced gluteus maximus, we officially as lunatics, marched into the Age of Reason. Our Universities flourished, manuscripts that were for centuries exclusively passed from one monk to the other, were finally discovered, printed and published, and for the first time distributed, freely or in secret, amongst the geeks thirsty of knowledge.

The transition needed a place where all are equal, where commoners can pay their bill, where all can sit together, where one must wait to be served,

hence one can listen and talk. This time of transition needed a coffee house.

The preparation of coffee is somewhat complicated, the beans need to be roasted, ground and brewed, so it takes time to serve a customer, there is always plenty of time to 'kill', yet the black liquid is cheap and affordable to all. The coffee houses near the Great Mosque in Cairo and the ones along the waterfront in Istanbul, the simple coffee shops in villages near markets in Yemen, or the big spacious elevated halls in the cities of Persia, the ones in London, Paris and Milan, all had the same in-common, they were visited by scholars, teachers, and students, sitting either on the floor or low benches talking, reading and discussing various manuscripts.

Coffee shops offered all of this: an informal seating that encouraged mingling, a door open to all that can pay a penny for the magic liquid, and a great atmosphere for study, debate and story-telling. They provided a place where different classes could meet and talk more freely than anywhere else, so much so, that in England they got nick named: 'penny universities'.

Coming back to the heart of the Asian continent, now in the 16th and 17th century, Chinese believed that within their Great Walls spreads all true civilisation. Outside it is wilderness and chaos haunted by robbers and barbarians. Within it, there is China, with large and well lit cities with water and drainage, Universities and large libraries, paper

money that allows the flow of commerce and growth of trade, markets and industry.

If you didn't know, the Chinese were the ones to invent the press, gunpowder, and the magnetic compass some centuries before these miracle war-inducing goods came to Europe. The land of silk, spices, stunning cities and amazing culture was in those days ruled in order and harmony by their Emperor, Thiencu, the Son of Heaven.

The size of their navy at the time was impressive; at the beginning of 15th century they counted more than 1,300 combat vessels, the world's largest and most technologically refined merchant marine and navy. Its ships sailed to the coasts of Africa and back but whilst the nations of Europe seemed to be entirely obsessed with the idea of domination, no Chinese King thought of waging a war against Europe or Africa.

For thousands of years they used the trade to communicate, crossing the dangerous mountains and hostile deserts, along the Silk Road, transporting and trading precious stones, spices and silk.

After the discovery of the sea route to India, the Portuguese were one of the first to open the trade with all the distant kingdoms of the Far East. They landed and settled for the first time in Macao's small harbour in mid-16th Century.

This is where Ama was born.

Macao had started her life as a shelter to weather storms, a port for refugees, mainly missionaries fleeing trouble in other parts of Asia, but was a good choice for settlement because of its perfect position: some 40 miles to the east-northeast, across the mouth of the Pearl River, is Hong Kong, and not further than 100 miles is Canton.

Not long after the first Portuguese had built their settlement, Macao developed into a major port for trade and the centre of culture and religion exchange funded by its soon-established virtual monopoly on trade between China and Japan, and Europe and East Asia.

In 1582, disapproving of the Portuguese violation of Chinese governance, the Chinese Main Governor summoned the Governor of Macao, the struggle for political supremacy between the two had continued for centuries to come.

However, underneath the layers of greed, beneath the selfishness of Royal Courts and Churches, something more mysterious and profound has connected the two lands: the Chinese and Europeans.

Stronger than the urge to trade, wage wars, posses, convert, amidst these turbulences, was our fascination with each another, our deep respect for the hidden beauty radiating from the other.

The Chinese Philosophy had developed in a different direction than the European one.

Nobody in China thought of studying Nature in an independent, methodical way, they approached it with a sacred awe for the mysteries of Universe, and built an amazing system of beliefs based on ancient mystic formulas, the system deeply rooted in the minds of people, interwoven into their way of life.

For the Chinese, Nature is a living organism and its breath lives in everything, producing different conditions of heaven and earth, called: Yang and Yin. The heavens, Yang, give light, warmth and life; while Yin or Terrestrial Breath, brings death and darkness. With the knowledge of the two, one can live happiness, abundance, and peace on Gaia.

The wisdom radiating from the ancient Chinese philosophies, wished to move into the grounds of Europe that desperately needed this 'female' approach to Earth and its beings. Europe that has already experienced it two and more thousand years ago.

"Holding the sacred word and the power of holy water — that is all you need," said the gypsy witch, her voice thick with a strange, deep accent. A snake, coiled lazily around her neck, flicked its tongue in the air as if sensing something unseen.

Maria, her voice barely a whisper, responded, "And what of the tears? The tears of Jesus... Can they be found?"

The witch's eyes narrowed, her face unreadable. "Maria's tears… From the grave of Jesus? That is no simple thing. Such a request, even the Gods would hesitate. It is the key to everlasting happiness, but not an easy road, child."

Maria swallowed, a tremor in her voice, "I will find it. I must."

The gypsy witch's smile was crooked, a flash of something darker. "Then seek the wizard, but beware — he is no ordinary man. He is of the ancient blood of Egyptian gypsies, a Bedouin from the endless desert sands, or perhaps a worshipper of Nuit."

Maria frowned, confused. "And where can I find him?"

The witch sighed, long and drawn out. "There are many paths. But you may also try a sailor from the farthest shores. A Sufi follower, or a wandering priest from Syria. You might journey up the Sinai Mountain... But be warned, none of these will speak to you, for they do not speak to women."

Maria stood still for a moment, the weight of the words sinking into her chest. She knew the witch

spoke truths wrapped in riddles. But she would not turn back. Not now.

A butterfly fluttered past, its delicate wings beating in the quiet air. As it passed, a strange whisper seemed to follow it. Maria turned, feeling the cold wind touch her skin as if to remind her of the vastness of what she sought.

Is a human being really able to discuss God and the Cosmos?

Her eyes widened. The voice wasn't just in her head, it was around her, echoing from some unseen place.

She whispered back into the silence, "Can any of us truly understand?"

A laugh, soft and ethereal, answered her. "Knowing God is a mystical experience... A journey of the subconscious, a voyage into the deepest parts of yourself."

Maria swallowed, her thoughts racing. The world felt both immense and impossibly small at that moment. A history of knowledge, of connection, stretched before her.

In the distant future, as the world hummed with the footsteps of passing tourists, an Englishman paused and gazed at the butterfly-shaped shadow cast on the ground. He smiled, his voice gentle. "Well, I

must say, the creature is rather charming... leaving traces of flowers behind its tail."

A woman nearby, a quiet smile playing on her lips, nodded. "Sometimes, the simplest things carry the deepest magic."

And in the soft, passing breeze, Maria felt the pull of something far greater than herself.

Archaeologists, on their quest to uncover the past, gathered to examine the soil. Enough remains of the building still stood to offer a glimpse into its former grandeur — on the summit of the hill, the ruins of a compound consisting of twelve houses formed a square.

"To the North we flew, in search of lost richness. To the South, in search of Goodness. To the East, towards the rising Sun. To the West, to meet the Kings," Pythagoras added, picking up a stone and examining its shape.

The lovers merged to unite with Tao. The innkeeper never minded the noise, for the couple had the same surname — newlyweds, they said, and that was not against the rules.

Hundreds of faces filled the market that evening, each seeking peace amid the unruly chaos of shopping. Black Friday, if you will, in any hemisphere, at any time of history.

Silvered by the moon's shadow, the lake mirrored either approval — or was it disapproval? Ruben needed that approval to define himself, whether as a ghost, a shadow, or a thought form just about to disappear. And so, the moon's reflection seemed to say: I approve of you!

The 16th and 17th centuries moved across the Earth like clumsy giants, shaking the roots of past beliefs and leaving indelible marks on scientific work and religious institutions. These centuries bore witness to profound shifts in knowledge, culture, and collective consciousness. Yet, our unconscious habits and ancient superstitions lingered, waiting for another spiral of awareness to intersect with them centuries later. This was the age of the first telescope discoveries and the earliest precise observations of the stars — the time when mathematicians and astronomers first challenged our geocentric view of the universe and its obsession with a human-cantered quantum reality.

Pythagoras stopped the story mid-air. "But it wasn't always like that!" His world was one of science, music, and mathematics. He had every right to complain. "God's Mind was stolen!" The cycles of growth, utilization, and decay are unbroken.

"Mela, God has a Mind that could be stolen!"

"God's Mind was stolen by Spiritual Fanatics."

At its peak, Athens had 25,000 voting citizens. Solon, the most famous Ancient Greek lawmaker, during the rule of Xenophones (570 BC–484 BC), acknowledged the existence of one God—the Universe itself.

"So, back to the eXcalibur of the WaRRioR — where is it?"

"It is in the script!"

As it is with all magical tales, Macao — or the Bay of A-Ma — was symbolically connected to the mainland by a sand land bridge, creating a peninsula in the shape of a lotus flower.

Throughout the course of human history, these two philosophies — western and eastern — were meant to merge. In the 17th century, Macao became the symbol of this union, an alchemical egg painted grey.

Various stories of miraculous rescues of fishermen lost in the rough sea have been attributed to A-Ma's divine intervention. In honour of her, the fishermen built a temple at the entrance of Macao's inner harbour. But the legend most profoundly tied to the deeper layers of our story is that of the Sun Goddess, Ama-Theresu.

Once, the Sun Goddess, Ama-Theresu, had a terrible quarrel with her brother, the Storm God. After one of those exhausting, fierce arguments that only

siblings can understand, she lost her sanity. Forgetting her true nature, she retreated into a cave, sealing the entrance with a massive stone, and leaving the world plunged in Darkness.

Oh, how heavy was the Darkness! Minute after minute, the tears of lilies and butterflies fell in vain. The Lady Balance hid her face within the lava of a newly birthed volcano, and Chaos reigned. Life, as we knew it, began to fade.

After the fourth night, even the Gods grew concerned.

An Oracle was summoned to bring Light to this dark puzzle of unconsciousness and uncover where the key lay hidden.

"Find an artist, a young maiden to create an atmosphere of magic and wonder in front of her cave," the Oracle instructed. "An energy that stirs even the tiniest forest spirits. A dance that embodies the excitement of the game — enough to tempt Her Majesty to step outside."

"Only the purity of Her own Being will draw the Goddess back to the Path of Life," the Oracle continued. "She must be exposed to her own Light. Place a mirror before her cave."

"Who is the maiden?" the Gods asked, looking around, their voices full of longing.

"You will find her among the stars," the Oracle replied, eyes glowing with secrets. "She has many names..."

The Oracle's voice echoed like a distant song as the Gods listened, enraptured by the unfolding mystery.

"Who is the maiden?" they asked, their voices like the rustling of leaves in a faraway forest.

The Oracle's eyes, dark and endless as the night, flicked to the stars above. "You will find her among the stars. She has many names..."

Her lips parted with a soft breath. "Nuit," she murmured, her voice carrying the weight of an ancient truth. "The Holder of Stars. She carries a lantern oiled with innocence and joy. Her voice is a soothing melody. Her touch, angelic."

A butterfly flew past, its delicate wings a whisper that broke the silence and wove nets of wisdom through the air. It carried a question with it...

"Alchemy is one of her names," the Oracle continued. "She is a witch, a healer, a magician, an artist of transformation — a guiding force that leads the soul toward union with the Holy Spirit. Unpredictable, she plays with Gods and Devils, manipulating energies to hasten our transformation."

"She is Maria, the Virgin Mother, always awake and ever watchful," the Oracle revealed softly. "But her name, this time, will be Ama — a woman who sleeps within all of us, Yin of Creation, nourishing the Earth and Her constant renewal."

In a village, there was an Ama — a girl at the peak of her vitality, with 'abundance' written upon her forehead. She had just emerged from her search for identity, blossoming into a remarkable human being. Like a fragile essence rising from the foam of a turbulent sea, she was gentle and giving in her openness, yet powerful and overwhelming in her beauty.

The Gods called Ama and shared their plan: Delight and Joy would be the keys to drawing the Sun Goddess out of her cave, to entice her to emerge from hiding.

Ama was a young dancer, mesmerizing the villagers with every movement. The crowd gathered, waiting in hushed anticipation, gossiping among themselves, yet none felt truly ready to celebrate.

Carried by Divine Ecstasy, Ama drummed with her feet and hands, her voice becoming an instrument in itself. She swayed in rhythm with her breath. Awakening spirits, enchanting Gods, and bringing joy to the people was the heart of her dance.

Dancing with Gods, with people, with animals, she teased them with her nakedness. Her burning body

moved effortlessly through the crowd, inviting all to forget their troubles and join in the wild festivity.

The invitation came too suddenly to refuse. The Essence became Now, and the past and future vanished.

And yes, the plot had worked! The Sun Goddess, surprised by the sounds of joy outside her cave, wondered why the world — supposed to be dying in Darkness without her — was full of cheer. Moving the stone to see what caused all the joy, she caught a glimpse of her own reflection.

She returned to the heavenly palace, vowing never again to be frightened by any storm.

Ama, of our story, was born in this temple at noon on June 21st, 1593, to an African mother, the wife of a Portuguese Lord and Alchemist, Ottavio de Nobille.

Gold is the first and the most perfect of the elements.
Gold comes from the centre of the earth, and while it passes through warm and pure places, it becomes the subtlest and purest element on Earth.
It is the most beautiful of all metals, the best that Nature can produce and no other element can corrupt it, or change it.
For what the eagle is among birds, the lion among beasts, the Sun among planets, such gold is among metals

Ruben a Jesuit Priest

The Dutch attack on Macao, the 24th of June 1622

Her skin was dark olive, tight and silky; her eyes, shaped like almonds, were piercing and deep. Her hands were like carved iron, fingers long and elegant. Her jet-black, curly hair framed a swan-like neck. Even though I wouldn't admit it at the time, I wanted her the very moment I laid eyes on her.

I got to know Ama during the Dutch attack on Macao, on the 24th of June, 1622.

Future generations will remember this date as 'Dia da Cidade,' or City Day — the day of miracles, the day of the fierce battle with the Dutch, who had set their sights on our fast-growing trade centre. By then, Macao had become the heart of the European-Far East trade route, making it an increasingly desirable prize. Over the last few years, Macao had repeatedly faced invasion attempts, and June 1622 marked the most violent and dangerous one.

Macao is sweltering and humid in the summer, especially when the ocean winds and the occasional typhoon fail to cool the air. Once or twice a year, the humidity reaches its peak, and the oppressive heat presses down on the land, making it impossible to move, breathe, or work. The settlement falls into a stifling sleep. During these moments, the heat becomes unbearable — it takes control, blanketing the narrow stone streets in dust and sticky sweat.

Both animals and people fight against the suffocating weight of the earth's sickness, confined to their shelters. It was in such a moment of stillness and lethargy that the Dutch launched their attack.

At around noon, a fisherman returned to the city, alarmed by the sight of a fleet of Dutch galleons. He entered the church breathless, nearly in tears, gasping for air, and panicking as he told me — the local Jesuit Portuguese priest, the man left in charge — that this was our last day, that there was no hope for our land, no God who could help us, and no nightmare worse than the one approaching.

The moment when thirteen massive ships appeared on the horizon, manned by thousands of men, was a living hell for the citizens of these three small islands.

Macao had become a gathering place for traders from Portugal and Spain, survivors of shipwrecks, refugees who had escaped Dutch prisons, and others who had found mercy from pirates escaping cruel death. By 1622, the population was a unique mix of Portuguese, Asians, and Africans.

When the priests and city council calculated the number of people capable of fighting, they counted only about 600 men over the age of twelve, nearly 3,000 women and children, and around 500 African slaves. Though Macao's population was much larger, this was a prime time for trade, and the army of

men was miles away in inland China, focused on trade in porcelain, silk, and spices. We were truly just a handful compared to the thousands of soldiers now approaching the island.

"God, why have you forsaken us?" I thought, the question echoing through my mind for what felt like an hour after hearing the Dutch were about to attack.

Everything seemed against us: the suffocating heat of the summer day, the settlement's weakened state under the oppressive air, the unfinished Monte Fort, and the atmosphere of fear, despair, and anger that gripped the crowd in front of the church. The ships surrounded us, mighty and ominous, and the long-feared Dutch attack was finally here. One is never truly ready for death.

My mind was in shambles.

Destiny had led me to China after a close encounter with Death. During my shipwreck, even though I trusted the captain's skill and the strength of our vessel that had carried us from Portugal, the storm was so intense that it shattered my confidence and awakened my deepest fears.

The tempest raged for hours, its fury escalating with every passing moment. Rain poured in torrents, and for days, we never saw the sun by day, nor the stars by night. The storm was so violent that no one could remain on their feet. The deafening roar of the

storm drowned out our voices. My fear was so overwhelming that I thought my mind would break when the ship gave its first terrible lurch. I remember the third day, when we struck a rock off the Formosan coast, and the ship, surrendering to the storm, began to sink. The creaking hull filled me with a grim certainty that we were at God's mercy, our fate now in His hands.

Yet, after the shipwreck, we managed to build an improvised boat, and after days of calm sailing, we reached the shores of Macao with nearly three hundred survivors.

At this point, before continuing our tale of battle with the Dutch, I feel compelled to introduce myself briefly — who I was at the time, my background, and the thoughts that consumed me.

I entered the Jesuits in Rome at the age of seventeen, and was ordained a priest three years later, with a special obedience to the Pope, vowing to go wherever I was sent. My love for Jesus, the truths of religion, and the pursuit of self-knowledge led me down this path — one of extreme faith, sacrifice, and hardship, the path of a spiritual warrior. Like all Jesuits, I took the vows of poverty and renunciation of worldly honours. The material world held no interest for me.

Going to foreign lands, surrounded by unfaithful people, strange customs, diseases, and danger, was

inevitable. But I had nothing to lose, only to spread Jesus's teachings and save souls.

After receiving permission from my superiors, I embarked on a Portuguese merchant ship, brimming with zeal, bound for China.

It was at the same moment that the Dutch fleet began to approach that my panic set in.

We had only a dozen cannons, an unfinished fort, and a handful of women, children, and slaves — nothing more.

"God, why have you forsaken us?" The words kept swirling in my mind, a constant refrain that felt like an unbearable weight pressing on me.

I paced like a caged animal, lost in my thoughts, trying to appear calm, even though inside I was trembling.

Just as my mind became overwhelmed with fear, a voice broke through.

"We have no time to waste!" she said.

I turned and saw her — Ama, a young African woman of mythic looks, dressed in her colourful sarong. She was a legend in Macao, admired and feared in equal measure. Some claimed she could speak to ghosts and animals, others whispered of

her otherworldly powers. To some, she was a saint, and to others, a witch, but she was undeniably a force to be reckoned with.

Ama possesses rich, dark skin with warm undertones, glowing with inner strength and wisdom. Her hair is thick, curly, and natural, often styled in intricate braids or left free, exuding a sense of freedom and confidence. Her deep brown eyes are piercing yet gentle, radiating intelligence and warmth. She carries herself with elegance and poise, her quiet, magnetic presence drawing others in. Her wardrobe blends traditional Chinese and African influences, with flowing fabrics, vibrant patterns, and ancient symbols — reflecting her dual identity in both the spiritual world and the earthly realm.

Ama had lived with her father, Ottavio de Nobille, an alchemist and scholar who had brought knowledge of philosophy, astronomy, and science to Macao. She was his favourite, and her birth had been surrounded by strange omens and rumours of divine intervention. Ottavio had named her Ama, after the goddess, in gratitude for the life saved at the cost of her mother's.

On the day the Dutch fleet appeared on the horizon, I felt deep within me that Ama was the one who could create the miracle we so desperately needed.

The impending attack had shattered my thoughts, my mind divided and scattered. Yet, when Ama spoke, clarity returned.

"We will find shelter within Monte Fort," she said, leading the way.

Ama was more than a guide; she was my prayer, and I, her warrior. Together, we inspired courage in those who followed us — slaves, women, and children alike — ready to die, ready to fight.

As the Dutch galleons approached, we stood ready. The battle was about to begin. But in that moment, I knew we would not go down without a fight. With Ama by my side, we had hope.

From the fort, we could clearly see the approaching ships.

"The galleons are landing, and boats are heading toward us," Ama observed, her calm, steady voice grounding us all.

We knew they were many. They didn't know how few we were. Fear was no longer on our side, but it was theirs. Our doubt was gone, and in its place stood the certainty of our cause.

It was in the moment of my first shipwreck that I saw the A-Ma temple, the very first building in Macao. The temple, perched on a cliff facing the sea, radiated grace and beauty. Its carved lions and flying eaves reflected the dawn light, welcoming all newcomers. The temple stood as a perfect embodiment of heaven on Earth, inspiring respect and obedience in equal measure.

The maze of red-hued prayer halls, pavilions and altars, Gods and Goddesses that ruled these lands, for an instant of amazement and insanity, opened a worshiping paradise within my heart. Centuries of prayers instilled the energy of harmony and purpose into the walls of this temple. When I have first arrived, I fell on my knees and kissed the earth: A-Ma was calling me…

Torches illuminated the colours of Ama's skin, and the glow of her smooth flesh became an invitation, weaving Timelessness into the fabric of this Myth. Her beauty unfolded, radiating the energy of Creation. Born in the mystical environment of the temple, Ama has always been connected to the spiritual realms. Her mother's birthing under such intense circumstances imbued Ama with a unique bond to both the Earth and the Universe

The maze of red-hued halls, pavilions and altars, echoed screams, drums, and multitude caring the voices of thousands of warriors, instilled this time the energy of HeLL through the Dutch troupes, and our lucky shot hit the Dutch Galleon with its Captain, fast spreading Fire through their Worlds. Our dozen cannons in the Fort with sounds of multitude quickly spread panic through their troupes that quickly withdrew defeated.

We were winners in no time, but amidst this euphoria, I found Ama again, standing apart, her face serene. "I will teach our children to hate wars," she told me quietly, her eyes fixed on the chaos around us.

Many Years Later, from the same Fort…

In the small, dimly lit room within Macao's Fort Ama, shadows danced against the walls. The only source of light came from the faint glow of a candle in the corner, casting a pale, flickering halo around Ama's focused face. Her eyes were sharp, her gaze fixed on the window as though she were waiting for a signal, the moment to act. The stillness of the room pressed in on her, but she remained poised, alert, every muscle taut with anticipation.

She moved silently, her steps barely a whisper on the cold stone floor, and approached the window. Her breath was steady but quick, knowing that time was slipping away. With a swift motion, she opened the window and released the white pigeon that had carried a message from her friends. The bird flapped its wings, catching the moonlight as it soared into the darkened sky.

Ama hesitated for only a moment, then, with an ease that betrayed years of practice, she climbed out of the window. Her feet hit the ground of the moonlit courtyard below with a muted thud. She took a brief moment to steady herself, a silent prayer escaping her lips before she moved further into the shadows.

Her old friends were waiting for her — the luzzu, a small fishing boat, bobbing gently at the edge of the water. Two men stood nearby, one holding the reins of a sturdy horse, the other with a cart ready for

their hasty departure. As Ama landed soundlessly in front of them, Krishna, breath quick and heavy with urgency, grabbed her arm, pulling her into a tight embrace.

"Time to move. We have no time to waste," he whispered urgently, his voice low but filled with intensity.

Ama nodded, her heart pounding in rhythm with the rush of adrenaline coursing through her. The wind picked up, carrying the sound of the pigeon's wings as it disappeared into the night. The air around them was filled with the sharp, exhilarating scent of freedom.

As Ama looked up, she noticed a bat circling above them, its dark wings cutting through the moonlit sky. The fluttering of its wings seemed almost like a signal, a sign that they were not alone in this escape. A strange sense of protection and exhilaration washed over her.

The bats, dark silhouettes against the pale glow of the moon, danced in spirals above, their movement almost hypnotic. It was as though they were in tune with something greater, something primal. It felt like the very forces of fire and wind were at play, guiding them on their journey.

Later, around the crackling fire, the tension that had gripped them loosened. They gathered together in a circle, their faces illuminated by the warm glow. The

rhythm of drums began, slow at first, then building as others joined in with chants, their voices rising together in powerful, unspoken unity. The beat of the drums matched the pulse of the earth beneath them, and the chants rose higher, filled with raw, untamed energy.

Ama and her companions danced around the fire, their bodies moving with a fluid grace, as if their very movements were part of the cosmic flow. The escape, the battle, the endless pursuit — all of it seemed to fade into the background. Here, in the firelight, they were not fugitives, but something more — part of something ancient and eternal, a celebration of life and survival. The rhythm carried them, their spirits entwined in the dance of the night.

For a man to do all that is demanded of him, he must regard himself as greater than he is.

Goethe

Father Benedict's Round Table of Solomon

Holy Tetractys, thou that contains the root and source of the eternally flowing creation.

"Everybody and everything on Earth lives under the influences of Yin and Yang," said a Chinese man, his expression deeply serious. He paused for a moment, letting the weight of his words settle. "Every single rock, plant, or water source hides within it a mixture of these two properties — spirits, manifestations — and for Life to reach its fullest potential, their proportions must be right."

I leaned in, intrigued by the intensity of his gaze. "So, what happens if the balance is no longer Harmony?" I asked.

"If there's too much heat or too much cold," he continued, his voice steady, "the Earth will not be fertile. Diseases will prevail, and people will not live in harmony. Yin follows Yang, just as birth follows death, night follows day, joy does not exist without sorrow, nor health without sickness."

I mulled over his words. Meditating on the meaning of life and human existence with my Chinese friends had become my favourite pastime, and this conversation was no exception.

Sitting inside Ole (Ama and Ottavio's) coffee and tea house, we had much to share.

The interior of Ole was a quiet sanctuary. It was a large, single room, simply decorated with cushioned benches running along the walls. Its simplicity was charming, and the whiteness of the walls danced with outbursts of colour from red and golden silk cushions. A water basin in the middle of the room gave us all a sense of peace and tranquillity.

I spent many summer nights and winter days frequenting this place — meeting friends and strangers, reading, writing, and discussing both the weather and the purpose of life on Earth. I spoke to peasants, craftsmen, merchants, slaves, and mandarins—all passing through Ole. People from China, Siam, Malaysia, Ceylon, India, Japan, the Philippines, Korea, and beyond, all returned to Ole year after year for inspiration.

The eclectic mix of traders and travellers intermingling on our little peninsula found refuge in Ole, leaving a bit of themselves with every visit. Macao had regular trade routes to Japan, the Philippines, and Indo-China, exchanging Chinese porcelain, silk, musk, and furniture made from precious woods for Japanese silver, sandalwood, amber, aromatic woods, incense from Indochina, and spices from the islands of South Asia. It was a very vibrant place.

Ole opened in the early morning, but it was in the evenings that it truly came to life. Evenings were reserved for storytelling, music, and candlelight poetry readings. Some were open to the public,

while others were for a special audience, invited only for the occasion.

"The art of making tea is called 'Cha Dao,'" said Ottavio, standing amidst the ancient vases and jars at a small carved wooden table, preparing for the tea ceremony. His movements were deliberate, like a dancer in sync with the rhythm of tradition.

Ama, carrying a tray laden with porcelain tea cups, added, "A good tea has the flavour of nature. It smells of spring mountain waters, earth, and air filled with the cold breeze of winter that has just decided to leave us." She smiled warmly, her hands gently placing the cups on the table. "To truly know the tea plant is to bring out its most fragrant properties — choosing the right pot, the right amount of tea leaves, the right water temperature, and the proper brewing time."

I watched them, fascinated by the devotion they poured into such an ancient ritual. Their bond was palpable, and it was clear that the art of tea-making was more than a craft to them — it was a sacred ritual.

"The smell of tea, its taste, its texture — how smooth it is, how hot the mixture is, how refined the leaves are—its right combination brings out the perfection in it," murmured Ottavio, as though he were speaking of alchemy rather than brewing tea.

He gently took the small porcelain cups from Ama, cupping them in his large hands, and placed them in a circle around a small, unglazed clay teapot made of red sand clay.

"To seal the inside of the teapot," he continued, his voice low and reverent, "I boiled a special old tea leaf mixture with water for many hours. The oils from the tea leaves sealed the pores of the fired clay, leaving a delicate scent that will stay with all our teas."

I was so absorbed in his words that I barely noticed the way Ama's eyes lit up as she began to speak. "This is green tea," she said, her voice soft but full of admiration for the plant. "The leaves of this tea are not broken, but dried into little buds. Come, bring the buds closer so I can smell them."

I held the tender leaves in my hands, feeling the warmth of the plant as if it still carried the mountain breeze in its veins.

"What is the difference between black tea and green tea?" I asked, my curiosity piqued.

Ama's smile deepened. "The difference is the length of the fermentation used to process the leaves."

I nodded, eager to learn. "So green teas are just lightly fermented?"

"Yes," she answered, her tone thoughtful. "The red and black teas could sometimes be fermented for years."

She placed the leaves back in the bowl and let them rest.

"Would you like to smell them again?" she asked, her voice warm.

I nodded eagerly and cupped the buds in my hands, taking in the earthy scent that seemed to carry the essence of the mountains. Each touch of the leaves seemed to connect me to something ancient.

After boiling the water, Ottavio rinsed the teapot and cups with the steaming liquid. Every movement he made was precise, meditative, as though he were performing a ritual with the utmost respect for all the elements: fire, water, earth, and air—and respect for the tea itself.

Using a bamboo tea scoop, he filled the teapot with tea leaves, then poured the boiling water into the pot, quickly draining the water out.

"This dispels any bitterness," he said softly, as though revealing a secret.

He poured the boiling water into the teapot again, and around 30 seconds later, he began pouring the liquid into the cups, moving the teapot in a

continuous motion so that each cup was filled at the same time.

"The tea has to be poured low to minimize the escape of aroma," he explained, as I watched the tea pour with an almost hypnotic rhythm. "It is important not to have bubbles in the pot."

I looked up at him, intrigued. "Bubbles?"

"Yes," he replied, leaning in slightly. "Bubbles, when mixed with the tea, form a foam that spoils its purity." He gave me a meaningful look. "Each cup should taste exactly the same and have the exact same colour."

I took the cup from him, feeling the warmth seep into my fingers. I sipped the tea, and the taste was different from its smell — bitter, earthy, yet comforting. I watched the leaves unfold in my cup, silently entering a state of meditation.

"Each pot of tea serves three to four rounds, and the same tea leaves are used again until the fragrance is gone," Ottavio explained.

I nodded, absorbing the wisdom he shared. "China is the homeland of tea."

"Yes," Ottavio confirmed with a smile. "We know that the Chinese had tea shrubs five to six thousand years ago."

Ama added, "During the mid-Tang Dynasty (around 700 AC), a Buddhist monk, Lu Yu, wrote the first Tea Classic. It was called Cha Ching, a script explaining and exploring the art of making tea. I love this ancient script — perhaps one of these evenings I can share it with you."

I leaned forward, eager. "I would love that."

Ama smiled warmly. "Tea is very popular in China. In summer, we cool ourselves by drinking it, and in winter, it warms us. We have a saying: 'Rather go without salt for three days than without tea for a single day.'"

I laughed softly. "I often see old men gathering around teapots, talking."

Ama nodded thoughtfully. "This we call Lao Jen Cha, the Old Men's Tea Ceremony, and we probably inherited it from our ancestors over 2,000 years ago."

After the tea ceremony, Ama smiled warmly and took my hand. "I want to show you something special," she said, her eyes gleaming. "The gardens behind the gate, reserved for friends and blooming wonders on this spring day."

I followed her through the small, ornate gate and into the gardens. As I stepped into the lush greenery, I was immediately struck by the serenity. Every structure, bridge, fence, and path was

designed with such imagination and care that it felt like walking through a living painting. Weathering had given meaning to certain areas, each one telling a story of time's passage.

Ama observed my admiration and chuckled softly. "You see, the plants and the paths here embrace the element of time with grace. In China, old age and death are not frowned upon. They are respected. Time is a teacher, and it brings wisdom, not sorrow."

I looked around thoughtfully, feeling the truth of her words settle in. "It's beautiful," I whispered. "It feels like the garden has its own soul."

Ama smiled and nodded. "It does. And this garden was built around a large pond. Water is an important element in Chinese life and is almost always present in Chinese gardens." She motioned to the sparkling water stretching out before us. "Even in dry gardens, you find water symbolized by grey gravel or sand, with patterns that mimic the flow of a river or lake."

I followed her gaze to the center of the pond, where an island stood alone, surrounded by water. "What's that?" I asked, my curiosity piqued.

Ama's voice grew softer, almost reverent. "That," she said, "is an island of immortals." She gestured toward the large stone resembling a miniature mountain. "It symbolizes the idea of eternal life. We

see it as a sacred place, and so it is no longer accessible to people. No bridges lead to it."

I watched the island in silence for a moment, then ventured, "But there are rocks placed around it, just a few, inviting visitors to hop from one to the other... It's almost like it's saying, 'With effort, one can still reach it and live everlasting happiness.'"

Ama's smile deepened as she nodded. "Exactly. It's a metaphor for the pursuit of wisdom and inner peace—an unreachable goal, yet a journey worth taking."

The trees and plants around us seemed to have their own stories to tell. As we walked along the paths, Ama pointed out the details. "Both bamboo and pine are evergreens," she explained. "They express longevity and happiness."

I raised an eyebrow. "So, what about the other trees? What do they represent?"

Ama looked over at a plum tree, its branches heavy with blossoms. "Ah, the plum tree. It brings forth qualities of vigor and patience. It blooms first after the cold winter months, reminding us that perseverance through hardship brings reward."

I paused, feeling the weight of her words, then noticed a group of large rocks placed strategically around the garden. They were set deep into the ground, their jagged edges and rough surfaces

seeming to tell a tale of ancient times. I couldn't help but ask, "Why are the rocks placed like this? Are they meant to symbolize something?"

Ama turned to me, her gaze thoughtful. "This garden is a shrine," she said, her voice quiet but filled with reverence. "Every stone, every tree, every pathway is a shrine. We surround ourselves with shrines to honor the elements, the natural world, and the wisdom it offers."

I looked around at the harmonious blend of nature and design, beginning to understand the depth of her words. "I see," I said, taking in the beauty with new eyes. "Every part of this place feels alive with meaning."

Ama's voice was calm as she continued, "In China, we build shrines everywhere — within our homes, at the entrances of our shops, at the corners of our streets, and even in the fields. Symbols, rituals, and magic are at the core of our being. We are connected to the divine in the smallest details."

As we neared the outdoor pavilion, Ama gestured for me to step inside. The floor was intricately carved in the shape of a Chinese character, its smooth lines drawing my attention. "This is where we honor the flow of water," she explained, her tone soft yet firm. "Through one of the carvings in the floor, a stream runs from the pavilion to the rocky garden."

I watched in awe as the stream trickled through the carved stone, winding its way down the path. Ama continued, "We give full respect to all the elements — Water, Air, Earth, and Fire. This idea can be found in many ancient traditions, like the Egyptian initiations at the Sphinx. The elements were worshipped as sacred forces, stolen from the gods."

I was struck by her words. "So, the elements themselves are divine," I mused, "and the Life Force — like a dragon — symbolizes the source of all creation."

Ama smiled, a twinkle in her eye. "Yes, just like the dragon in Chinese mythology. It represents the Life Force itself. Throughout our myths, the man swims through layers of consciousness, taming the dragon with knowledge and light." Her eyes softened. "You remind me of the ancient Greeks, who believed in the power of numbers and their connection to the divine."

I smiled, feeling a spark of recognition. "I've studied their work. Pythagoras, for example, believed that the divine number — the Tetractys — was the foundation of all creation."

Ama's face lit up as she nodded. "Yes, I know of the Tetractys. It is the key to understanding the harmony of the universe." She recited it from memory: "'Bless us, divine number, thou who generated gods and men! O holy, holy Tetractys,

thou that contains the root and source of the eternally flowing creation!'"

I felt a sense of wonder as I joined her, reciting the ancient prayer together. "By that pure, holy, four-lettered name on high, nature's eternal fountain and supply, the parent of all souls that living be, by him, with faith, find oath, I swear to thee." The words seemed to resonate in the air, echoing in the sacred space we stood within.

Ama's voice softened. "The teachings of Pythagoras and Plato resonate with many of our own beliefs. The Demiurge, or the Tao, represents the creator—the source of all things." She paused, her gaze deep in thought. "The Demiurge is not evil, as some believe. It is the force of creation, of life itself."

I couldn't help but feel a deep connection to the wisdom of both cultures. "The idea that creation itself is a divine force, not a corrupt one… that's something I've always believed," I said quietly.

Ama smiled, as though she had read my heart. "Yes, many cultures share this understanding, even if they express it differently." She gestured to the dragon symbol carved on the stone near us. "The dragon represents good fortune, power, and the balance of nature. Did you know that the Emperor of China is the only one permitted to have dragons carved on his house, clothing, or personal articles?"

I raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "Really? So, why do you have these?" I gestured to the dragon sculpture by the pond.

Ama laughed. "Not on clothing, though!" She chuckled softly, her laughter echoing in the air. "The dragon's power is reserved for the Emperor, but we honour it in other ways—through art, architecture, and symbolism."

I nodded, understanding the balance of reverence and restriction. "It's fascinating," I said. "The dragon in Mesopotamian culture—the muš-uššu—is completely different. It has the body of a snake, the front legs of a lion, and the back legs of a bird."

Ama's eyes sparkled with interest. "I know of this creature. It's fascinating how different cultures shape their myths and symbols. Chinese shamans, for instance, are educated for decades, studying weather forecasting, magical healing, dream interpretation, astrology, and feng shui to communicate with the gods and spirits."

I reflected on this, feeling the vastness of knowledge they must possess. "In the West, we have similar traditions, though different in nature. I've studied the ancient Greeks, their philosophy and mathematics—how they believed numbers were connected to the divine."

Ama smiled, appreciating my perspective. "We may come from different traditions, but the core of our

beliefs is the same. We seek the divine through knowledge, through harmony, and through the elements."

We both fell silent for a moment, appreciating the sacredness of the conversation. Finally, Ama turned to me with a warm smile. "Shall we return to Ole? I believe it's time for a cup of coffee to ground us."

I nodded, feeling the weight of the wisdom shared between us. As we walked back to the tea house, I felt like I was carrying a piece of the garden with me—a reminder that wisdom, whether ancient or modern, transcends time and place.

"This is not my first time in a coffee shop," I said, taking Ama's hand. "I first came across these fascinating gathering places while travelling across villages in Yemen. Mokeya that was the name of these places. They stand in the open country, before the other village huts, at the edge of settlements, offering Kischer, a hot infusion made from coffee beans, to travellers. This drink was strange at first — bitter and strong — but it had the most amazing smell. It's a bit like black tea, but with an earthy overtone to its taste. They served it in simple, yet beautiful, earthenware cups, and always gave water out for free."

Ama raised an eyebrow, intrigued. "Kischer, you say? I've never heard of it. What did you like about it, despite the bitterness?"

At the start, the bitterness took some adjusting, I thought back to the experience. "It was the whole ceremony, the anticipation — watching the beans roasting, the grinding, and the brewing. It felt like a ritual. Then, after a while, I became hooked, not just by the taste, but by the atmosphere it created. The warmth, the aromas... It was more than just a drink. It was an experience, a kind of slow meditation."

Ama smiled softly, clearly enjoying my story. "And now you drink it in China?"

"Here, at Ole," I replied, "it's a different kind of ritual. Beautiful porcelain cups, the space near the water, with so many windows and these little private galleries overlooking the endless blue — it's calming. The front garden is open to everyone, and it changes with the seasons, always bringing a new perspective." I gestured to the garden outside, where the light played softly over the flowers. "I often find myself contemplating the secrets of existence there."

"Ah, yes," she nodded, "the space invites that kind of reflection."

Ottavio, who had been listening intently, took a deep breath, clearly ready to dive into one of his beloved philosophical discussions. "You know, in the West, our world is rational and intellectual," he began, his voice rich with thought. "It operates within linear

thought, formulas, clear logic — the Solar, Male, Yang of creation."

Ama turned to him with a knowing smile, "And in China, thinking is more intuitive, more imaginative. It's the heart, filled with symbols, signs, sounds, and meditations. The Yin of creation, the Moon, the Female child of the Universe."

Ottavio grinned, clearly enjoying the flow of conversation. "If only we could truly achieve it," he mused, "The merging of Yin and Yang, Solar and Lunar ways of thinking... That's the key to reaching a new level of consciousness, don't you think?"

I thought for a moment before responding. "It's been attempted for millennia. Both East and West have sought to connect to the divine, but Ratio alone can't bridge the gap. It's through art, music, and poetry—expressions of beauty—that we've tried to reach the divine. The mysticism is in the pursuit itself, as much as the destination."

Ama listened carefully, her eyes thoughtful. "So, you're saying the ancient Europeans used beauty as a bridge to the divine?"

"Yes," I said, "and not just beauty but symbols, sound, and words. The Neolithic structures in Europe were not just buildings; they were portals to higher knowledge. Writing, chanting — it was all part of their spiritual language."

Ottavio leaned forward, intrigued. "And in your research, you found these symbols and sounds to be connected to alchemy, didn't you?"

I nodded. "Yes, alchemy is all about transformation, turning the carbon of the human soul — represented as graphite — into the diamond of spiritual enlightenment. It's an internal process. And if we could achieve this transformation, it would mirror the process of turning base metals into gold. The alchemy of humanity."

"Fascinating," Ottavio said, pouring more tea into my cup. "But you mentioned Europe's historical confusion earlier. How does that fit into your research?"

"Well," I began, "the confusion started when European minds equated the Roman Empire with Greece and Macedonia, overlooking civilizations older than Rome itself. Greece, for example, was far more advanced than Rome, but civilizations like Babylon and the Danube Vinča date back even further. These cultures, deeply devoted to Mother Earth, were already carrying symbols and sounds to connect with the divine long before Rome rose to power."

Ama nodded, her curiosity piqued. "So, what of the ancient civilizations that shaped these ideas"

I smiled, pleased to dive deeper. "The Egyptians, for one, were incredibly advanced. Every European king

had teams of scholars studying Egyptian wisdom. And there's a direct line from the ancient Danube civilizations to Greece and Rome. These civilizations, all connected, helped to develop our shared mystical and philosophical heritage."

"Tell me more about your hometown," Ama said, her voice gentle but insistent. "You mentioned SiRMiuM."

"Yes," I replied, "It's a place where history runs deep. In the northern frontier of the Roman Empire, along the banks of the Danube to the Adriatic Sea, SiRMiuM was a crossroads of civilizations. The ancient Romans, alongside other cultures, left a rich history—of martyrs, of rituals, and of gods."

Ottavio looked intrigued. "Martyrs, you say?"

"Yes," I said, "it's nicknamed the city of martyrs. And growing up, I often played in the archaeological sites, digging for ancient jars. It's funny — children would collect them like treasure. But those jars, those relics, tell the story of a much larger narrative. A narrative that stretches across centuries and cultures."

Ama was silent for a moment, clearly reflecting on the weight of my words. "And how does this connect to the idea of Dionysus and resurrection?"

"Dionysus," I began, "was a god of wine, fertility, and ecstasy. The worship of him goes back to the Mycenaean Greeks, but the deeper idea is that of

death and resurrection. Dionysus, the saviour, grants eternal life, and it's through these rites that the connection between the soul and the divine was passed on. These ideas shaped the spirituality of Greece and beyond."

Ottavio took a slow sip of his tea, then leaned back in his chair. "And what of the name 'JeSu,' as you mentioned earlier?"

"That's the crux of it," I said. "The name 'JeSu' comes from the sound 'Y-SH,' which was worshipped as the name of the Supreme Female/Sun God in Europe. In the ancient monotheistic traditions, the followers of the one God believed in the trinity — a unity that transcended the male and female, the sun and moon. The idea that we are all part of something greater."

Ama's eyes sparkled as she leaned in. "But can you kill for God?" she asked, her voice soft but piercing.

The question hung in the air, a profound silence following it.

Ottavio looked at her, then back at me. "We ask the same question in alchemy. Can you kill for transformation? Is there a way to use hardship as a catalyst for growth, or does it break us?"

"The real transformation comes through love, not force," I replied, thinking of all the alchemical processes I'd studied. "Love is the key element that

induces higher states of consciousness, like the mystical 'Sh' sound that symbolizes divine connection."

Ama nodded, her face serene yet contemplative. "Love is the answer, isn't it?"

Ottavio remained thoughtful. "When we are treated with love and respect, we can transform — just as carbon can become diamond. But when treated with cruelty and hardship, how long before we lose our humanity?"

We all fell silent, the weight of the question lingering in the air as we reflected on the path toward transformation — both spiritual and personal.

"A human being could be studied by investigating a section of their liver or brain, or by observing the amazing matrix of the soul's behavioural patterns," Ama mused, her footsteps light as she moved gracefully through the hall.

I watched her intently, captivated by the thoughts floating in her words. "What is better: to build our knowledge from individual broken segments, forming a thousand-piece mosaic puzzle that clearly obstructs our vision, or to follow the spiritual, intuitive way that uncovers the secrets of the cosmos, interwoven with a magical game of our own imagination?" she asked, turning to Ottavio and then to me with a piercing gaze.

"Is there a man on Earth who could bridge the gap between the two, who will not be discouraged by the barriers of different languages or the dogmas of religions?" She paused as though waiting for the answer to emerge from the very air.

For a moment, the weight of silence enveloped us. It crept into my thoughts, settling deep within my being. The stillness felt alive, like it had a narrative of its own, one that traced the origins of longing, deep as the breath of creation itself.

Ama and Ottavio's lives had intrigued me from the moment I arrived in Macau. Shrouded in mystery, their thoughts were free, untethered by conventional expectations, a rarity in the world I knew.

Their home, the coffee and tea house 'Ole,' was a sanctuary — a place where boundaries melted away and discourse flourished. It wasn't a noisy, cluttered space, but one of serene simplicity, where the whitewashed walls, the soft stone floors, the faint incense, and the ocean view created an atmosphere that invited deep reflection.

Ottavio was a man of vast knowledge, versed in both Western and Eastern philosophies, while his daughter, Ama, seemed to breathe an air of sacred wisdom into every conversation. Both had gathered around them a curious collection of scientists, artists, and intellectuals, drawn to the transformative energy that lingered in the air.

The evening had drifted into stillness after Ama's performance with the bianzhong — a majestic instrument of 65 bronze bells. Her hands moved as though each finger had its own mind, guiding the music with an effortless grace that transcended intellectual control. It was a journey of sound — a spiritual exploration that danced through the air like phoenixes soaring on unseen currents.

I examined the instrument afterward, marvelling at its intricate beauty. The three-tiered frame was adorned with Chinese characters, each bell representing not only a sound but a profound symbol. Ama explained that she was studying the 3,000 characters engraved upon it, each of which formed a treatise on ancient Chinese musical theory.

"This instrument was a gift from the Chinese Emperor," she said. "It's a replica of a 2,000-year-old organ used by the court musicians to create ritual music. But this one is much smaller. Still, the musical potential is extraordinary."

Ottavio nodded proudly, his voice low and thoughtful. "It's fascinating that nearly every major text from ancient China—whether philosophical or poetic—discusses music. Music as an essential part of ritual, a key to understanding the very fabric of Nature itself."

A thought stirred in me. "In the Balkans, there's a similar notion. The soul — or 'Duša' in Slavic — is on a journey, influenced deeply by sounds and their

frequencies. Early Slavic monotheistic thought reflected a single, supreme God, and this mystical understanding culminated in the concept of the Holy Trinity."

Ama leaned forward, intrigued. "Music as a key to consciousness and connection… That makes sense. Confucius, too, believed music played a role in social order. It reflected the balance and regularity of Nature. It wasn't about mere sound — it was a reflection of wholeness."

Ottavio added, "In China, they compare musical pitches to cosmic Qi energy, as if the very vibrations are a manifestation of the universe itself. The ancient sages constructed a framework of sounds, symbols, and numbers to interpret the natural world and human life."

Ama's eyes sparkled with a kind of quiet reverence. "The 12-pitch scale was discovered by Ling Lun, the Yellow Emperor's minister. He observed the songs of the phoenix — six calls from the male, six from the female. This became the foundation of Chinese music, tied directly to the lunar cycles. Each pitch belongs to a specific phase of the moon and relates to different aspects of human behaviour."

"The 12 pitches align with the 12 lunar cycles," Ottavio said thoughtfully, "creating a system where music, nature, and humanity are intertwined. Each pitch resonates with a different aspect of existence."

The more I listened, the more I felt the profound interconnectedness of all things. Ama's passion for Chinese knowledge, for sound and its role in the cosmos, stirred something in me. It was as if every note, every vibration was a clue, a piece of a vast puzzle that reached beyond our mortal understanding.

"The shift of ages," Ama whispered, almost to herself. "We're living through it, aren't we?"

Her words hung in the air like a sacred truth. History had often predicted the end of an age, the shift of one cycle into another. The 16th-century astrological texts had foreseen it, with their strange, mystical calculations. The number 16, composed of 7 and 9, divine numbers amplified a hundredfold—this, they said, was the harbinger of a new era.

Ottavio laughed softly, dismissing the fatalistic tone of the prophecy. "The end of the world, predicted a thousand times over," he said with a wry smile. "People always look for an end. But in truth, every 'end' is just a transformation."

There was a quiet pause as his words sank in, a subtle reminder that endings are often merely the prelude to something new.

Ottavio's wealth and influence in Macau had been the subject of much speculation. Many questioned his sources of fortune — whispers of old debts, secret dealings, and even darker rumours had

circulated. Yet Ottavio never spoke directly of his past, always deflecting curiosity with humour or mystery.

One evening, over tea, I decided to ask him about his alchemical pursuits. He leaned back, a gleam of mischief in his eyes.

"With alchemy, my dear friend," he said, "I did learn how to make gold. It's not just about turning metal into gold, though — it's about transforming people, too. Gold is the external manifestation of something deeper. Just as I work with metals, I work with people, helping them reach their highest potential."

His smile was knowing, almost devilish. "Alchemy," he continued, "is an art passed down through the ages, one that connects science, spirituality, and the mysteries of the cosmos. It was once said that the secrets of alchemy were divinely revealed to Adam. When humanity unlocks the wisdom contained within, the curse of the forbidden fruit will be lifted."

I listened intently, sensing that Ottavio's words were more than just philosophical musings. They were pieces of a much larger, timeless narrative — one that stretched back to ancient civilizations and reached forward into a future we could only begin to imagine.

His laughter was soft, almost philosophical. "But making gold isn't the true work of alchemy," he said. "The real work is in transforming the soul."

"The sacred Egyptian SH, which later became W in English, eventually transformed into the Greek Σ and the S of the Latin Spirito Santo, as early as the Ancient Greek translations, concealing the SH vibration of Isis — representing Death, the Underworld, Night, Meditation, Minos, Mum, Nirvana, Death, Sub consciousness, or the YiN of Consciousness. In Ancient Europe, this potent sound gradually lost its power with the loss of sounds such as Ž, Đ, Š, DŽ, and Č."

"There is no CH as in 'cheese' or 'ČoNo' in Greek as in 'church' in English. So, the first translations of any ancient text into Ancient Greek, whether using Θ, ῶ, Σ, or M, resulted in a different sound. CH always sounded like K. At one point in history, within Ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, and Geez, all the names of gods, influential figures, kings, or pharaohs carried sounds like Ž, Đ, Č, DŽ, or SH. These sounds were part of ritual practices, with their deep, male musical scale contrasting against the angelic female sounds of N and M sung through the Greek Ἀμήν (AMEN), AMON, or AMIN."

"It's like speaking a universal language," I said. "The language of gods, the first language, understood by all."

As a philosopher, I knew that through pictures — like those in ancient Egyptian spirituality — whether we are Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Taoists, Jews, Atheists, or Buddhists, our scientists, applied psychologists, and consciousness researchers always followed their innermost drive for goodness as part

of their soul's quest, regardless of the personal growth system they chose. This, I believed, was the essence of alchemy.

The whole world of mythological creatures was a gift of conscious and unconscious learning, and some remarkably talented scientists over the last two hundred years had devoted their lives to translating these works.

I had seen Ottavio transform many times.

Ottavio and I shared the same fascination with the glorious lady Knowledge, although people's little peculiarities and weaknesses never quite amused him.

"I am a heretic, my dear friend Benedict," Ottavio said, looking into my eyes, "all these books make you one." He nodded. "But all the knowledge in the world is useless if we do not act consciously, understanding the consequences of our actions and thoughts."

"Can we ever hope to understand the consequences of our actions on the lives of people who will live many centuries after us?" I asked, not expecting an answer.

Did Christ know that his teachings would be used and abused during centuries of religious wars? Did Moses know that a thousand years later we would

still struggle to understand his main command: 'Do not kill'? Does everything happen for a reason?

That evening, we were invited to a dinner and treated to a variety of delicious vegetarian dishes.

Each dinner at Ole was a carefully prepared masterpiece. An amazing variety of wholesome Chinese treats teased our taste buds.

Each dish was presented in exquisite porcelain ware, gifts from various courts. The fineness of the porcelain, with its delicate paintings, was impressive. The elegant, deep-blue flying-fish dragons writhing against stormy waves stared at us, passing their wishes for good fortune, long life, immortality, and plenty. Peaches, representing immortality, pomegranates symbolizing fertility, and apples — homonyms for peace — greeted us symbolically as we sat down to eat.

The drinks were served in porcelain jugs shaped like women playing instruments, with divine fruit nectars flowing from their hands, reminding us of the importance of music.

Veggie fried rice, bright, crisp, and spicy Chinese beans, tasty steamed buns, fragrant ginger and lemongrass-flavored vegetable salads, young, thin beans tossed in soy sauce with fresh ginger in a stylish side dish, roasted tofu browned to perfection, and little rice and sesame pancakes topped with a crunchy salad of nuts, marinated red cabbage, and

Chinese salad leaves. All of these magical dishes performed their own séance.

At first, we indulged in the tastes, smells, and textures, soon to be released into the waters of mental endeavor. After the meal, finding myself in front of Ottavio's amazing library, I picked a book at random, caressing its leather covers. The printing press had brought a complete revolution to our worlds: I was witnessing the huge expansion of knowledge amongst the educated classes across different cultures.

The book in my hands was Malleus Maleficarum, otherwise known as the Witches' Hammer, the book that became fundamental to the superstitious gibberish of millions of people who believed in witches.

"Did Pope Innocent know what kind of effect he would have on the masses before he drafted his decree talking about witches?" I queried, showing the book to Ottavio.

"Did the Dominican monks who wrote the Witches' Hammer know that the book would become the largest execution manual of all time?" Ottavio replied, holding the book. "Do the first two superstitious witnesses, accusing their neighbors of witchcraft, know that their accusations will spread like wildfire and eventually cause the deaths of their own daughters and mothers?"

I wasn't the only priest who disagreed with this book and the methods used by the Inquisition to torture innocent women. It was a matter of constant debate among us within the Monastic Order, and I became very angry every time somebody supported it. The fact that we were so far away from mainland Europe made my resistance to these hateful and spiteful acts possible.

"A Confucian would say that it is a man who makes the Way great." Ottavio raised his voice in anger as he spoke about the manual, clearly enraged.

"It is man who can change and shape history. We are not peasants, or some sort of victims. We are staging this little performance called life."

"What a horrible book, a burning manual!"

A typical craze would start with one or two suspects, and through forced confessions, it would spread indefinitely, taking hundreds and sometimes thousands of innocent lives. The longer the panic lasted, the larger the numbers, and the wealthier the victims.

Treading the path of the development of human thought, giving full respect to Mother Philosophy and acknowledging how difficult it is to implement any noble idea in a world where peace — humanity's highest potential — is still a very distant goal, I was in awe of leaders who introduced democracy in their city-states centuries before Christ.

In search of perfection, veneering many centuries of struggle for equality, researching consciousness, and the arena of alchemy in human society, some of the most amazing social experiments and their implementation by exceptional souls were born around the Mediterranean more than 2,000 years ago.

"Look at all the discoveries of those young and excited minds, galloping freely from their cages of centuries of the Dark Ages!" I could hear someone say.

"So many souls have descended to guide us through this transition. So many books have been published that break our current beliefs, so the new ones will be born from their ashes."

Somebody had picked Campanella's book and read aloud: Truth can be hidden and persecuted, but it cannot be held prisoner by injustice; in the end, it emerges from the darkness and is once again resplendent.

As a priest, writer, and professor, I had access to the works of Campanella, Copernicus, and Giordano Bruno, and I admired their fight against the dogmatic systems within the Church.

Giordano was one of my teachers, and his work inspired me greatly. A well-travelled, well-educated priest who lived in Switzerland, France, England, and Germany, he translated books, lectured, and

wherever he could, announced the new view of the Universe.

Picking up De la Causa, Principio e Uno, I started reading Giordano Bruno's contemplations on God:

'The absolute potential is one, the act is one, the form or soul is one, the material or body is one, the thing is one, the being is one, one is the maximum and the best. It is not generated, because there is no other being it could desire or hope for, since it comprises all being. It does not grow corrupt because there is nothing else into which it could change, given that it is itself all things. It cannot diminish or grow, since it is infinite.'

"Our amazing culture gave birth to the likes of Giordano Bruno," I whispered thoughtfully.

"Giordano spoke of the infinity of the universe," Ottavio whispered back, turning his head towards the starry night. "So, he says that we are not alone... An Italian, I've heard?" Smiled Ruben.

"He lived all over the world, in Switzerland, France, England, Germany, worked as a translator of many inspiring books, lecturing, and wherever he could, announcing the new view of the Universe. I was talking about a man who inspired me greatly, so I happily took a role of a narrator about his amazing work and his unfortunate destiny."

"A life of a travelling scholar and a lecturer, I wouldn't mind that type of life." Ruben added.

"Giordano was a Christian?" Somebody asked.

"Yes, a Dominican friar, but he saw the Church teachings as entirely irrational, based on no scientific basis. He had believed in an infinite universe which had left no room for Christian God that was solely occupied with Earth and humans. His philosophy made the mystery of the virgin birth meaningless, and he thought that only the ignorant could take the Bible literally." Ottavio joined our discussion with a zest of a true heretic.

"His integrity and the lack of compromise towards his ideas got him imprisoned and he spent six long years in the dark dungeons of a Papal prison." I continued the story. "And yet, when threatened by the death sentence Giordano answered: "Perhaps you, my judges, pronounce this sentence against me with greater fear than I receive it.".

"Perhaps you, my judges, pronounce this sentence against me with greater fear than I receive it." Repeated Ruben thoughtfully.

"Is it true that he was the leader of an underground movement?" Asked Ottavio.

"That I don't know, but what I know is that he was a prophet whose thoughts changed the world bringing

about a cosmological and moral revolution." Said Ruben.

"Killed as a heretic, burnt by the Inquisition in Campo di Fiori in Rome in 1600." Ottavio offered the un-happy ending.

A brief silence covered the room. The faces around the fire were contemplating the life and work of a man who was not alone, but had to die because he was the first one to publically challenge and disapprove the obvious.

"The ancient thought, that universal orbits must be circular, was not a new re-discovery for Europe," I said.

"Ancient Greece, between 800 BC and 100 BC saw most amazing advances in art, philosophy and science, and it was the age of city-states or polis that had own Local Governments, free of Global Taxes, protected by own Gods, for hundreds of years.

This was the time when science and religion were not separate, and getting closer to the Truth (In Search of Truth) meant getting closer to the Gods. Classical Greece is considered to be the seminal culture or the cradle of Western civilisation.

Just to give you an idea of how advanced this civilisation was, Pythagoras and his students, Plato and Aristotle, both from Athens, understood the

importance of symbols, numbers, or mathematics as instruments of Universal Truth that offer divine knowledge, following the main Macro manifesting within the Micro principle. Pheidon of Argos established a system of weights and measures; Theagenes of Megara brought running water to the city; Homer produced his Iliad and Odyssey, later found in the rich Egyptian mummy burial cases; sculptors created statues as memorials to the dead; Anaximander devised a theory of gravity; Xenophanes wrote about his discovery of fossils; and Pythagoras discovered his famous theorem.

As farming villages grew larger, they developed their own governments and organised their inhabitants around a set of laws. They all had economies that were based on agriculture. These city-states were known as poleis and were protected by their own gods or goddesses.

Athens and Sparta were both protected by Athena—or perhaps I shall call her aXeN. Most cities had overthrown their hereditary kings or priests, and each of these poleis was an independent city-state. The new poleis were self-governing and self-sufficient. The emerging poleis were not politically controlled by their founding cities.

Following the Classical period was the Hellenistic period, spanning from 300 to 100 BC, during which we find Alexander the Great within the walls of Babylon.

This classical period also brought with it a political reform known as “demokratia”, or “rule by the people”.

“By the 6th century BC, Greece had influential governments: Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Thebes, and Argos. Athens and Corinth also became major maritime powers. In this period, the advent of the democracy of Athens led to a 'golden age' for the Athenians. They spread Greek art and initiated a creative revolution, which spread around scientific circles very quickly, notwithstanding the dangers posed by the Church.” This time, it was Ama breaking the silence.

“Despite the threat of the Inquisition, Galileo Galilei, another great man and scientist, after his discovery of the astronomical telescope and his detailed research, published revolutionary works describing the motion of the Earth around the Sun.” Ruben was back to the Age of Reason.

“You’re talking about the Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems, aren’t you?” asked Ottavio. “After he published this work, the Inquisition quickly declared his views absurd and arrested him.”

“You’re fortunate to be living in China,” I turned towards Ottavio. “Otherwise, you would have had the same fate.” I smiled at my dear friend.

"For sure," laughed Ottavio. "A witch, a wizard, a magician, an alchemist, or simply a man who is not afraid to question — these are the worst! Also, I would not wish to stay anywhere else, my dear friend, this is where everything IS happening!"

"We find the Ancient Egyptian name of God in Greek translations to be: NΘR, sounding a bit like the Ancient Chinese Taoist Tao Te Ching story of Yi (as one), which created aR (as two) and SaN (as three), while the Babylonians speak of the same theological concept of the Trinity of sounds and frequencies that have carried the manifestation into Being, as female and male."

"A bit like Chinese…" Ama added.

"We find the Ancient Egyptian name of the Supreme God written as nHr or nTr or nDr (sounds of X for Xristos, Đ for Jay, and Č for chakra or čovek in Slavic), symbolically represented as a moving X, a spiral, a snake, a Kundalini moving wheel—the Supreme Goddess."

"Our ancestors were supreme masters in sound frequency. When they gave us symbols or sounds, they did it with a complete science/theology within their mysticism and magic in mind. Treat them as the most educated researchers in human history — perhaps 0.001% of humanity — who were trying to pass their knowledge to us. The Ancient Egyptians, for example, spoke of the sounds used to change energy from one form to another. So, they called

the Gods by sounds like H, D, or T, pronouncing them as X, Đ, or Č, allowing the soul to take the quality of the sound of the Gods. For example, the sounds R or B carry within their sound Ra, BoDy or BuDHa, Dio (the enlightened one). Bu in Chinese means 'towards the divine'; Bu takes the sound of the name for the soul in Ancient Egypt, or the number eight in China — infinity, meaning also a prophet, a God in the making — symbolically represented as the cross + Yi (that is one) - + I (descending from heaven), forming a human soul blessed by the Divine Spirit."

"Fascinating!" Ama was the first to break the silence.

"So, that's why the Church increased the use of censorship with its list of forbidden books, the Index Librorum Prohibitorum," asked Ottavio, turning to Ruben.

"You are speaking to the converted. I strongly disagree with the Church that blesses slaughters in the name of God," Ruben agreed.

"Our task is, for sure, to find where the balance between the two lies — between science and spirituality on Earth," Ottavio nodded. "Now, this IS a difficult task."

"Science and spirituality are so intrinsically different that it is impossible to establish peace between them," Ruben contemplated.

"The male and female sides of God's creation, Yang and Yin of Nature, the mental and emotional sides of the human mind — the supremacy of any one causes the destruction of Balance and Harmony." Ama's hands danced in a sort of tai-chi movement. Her graceful figure shifted, and her hands circled their way into harmony, visually announcing this eternal truth.

"Who could possibly understand the Way?"

This was the time when I was re-discovering the writings of the 'pagans': Greek, Roman, and Egyptian philosophers, whose works were being re-published, bound in silk, and revived after centuries of neglect.

The truth revealed in these texts went beyond the fashion of manuscript searches and hunts for undiscovered classics.

The philosophy of our age is tightly connected to the Old and New Testaments, but with the discovery of the printing press and the re-discovery of Greek and Latin texts, the scientific minds of our era were challenged and opened to new ideas.

At that moment, I was reading Metamorphoses: Transformation, an epic poem in fifteen books written 2,000 years ago by the Roman poet Ovid, completed in 8 AD. The poet's writings were based on already fully established Ancient Greek manuscript traditions. Rewriting myths, the creation

story, Ovid begins by describing how the elements emerge from chaos, and how mankind degenerates from the Golden Age to the Silver Age and then to the Iron Age. This is followed by an attempt by the giants (Titans) to seize the heavens, at which point the god "Jove" sends a great flood that destroys all living things, except for one couple, Deucalion and Pyrrha.

Metamorphoses, as a collection of myths, is influenced by an earlier Greek work called Theogony (Θεογονία), "Birth of the Gods," attributed to Hesiod in 700 BC. Hesiod describes how the gods were created, their struggles with each other, and the nature of their divine rule. In Theogony, the origin (arche / aRČe) is Chaos, a primordial condition—a gaping void (abyss)—the beginnings and ends of the earth, sky, sea, gods, and mankind. Symbolically associated with water, it is the source, origin, or root of all things that exist. Then came Gaia (Earth), Tartarus (the cave-like space under the earth), and Eros, who became the creator of the world. The majority of the hymns celebrate the twelve Olympian gods and goddesses who dwell on Mount Olympus. In ancient Greek philosophy, arChe is the first principle of all things. Thales (700 – 600 BC) claimed that the first principle of all things is water.

In the Babylonian creation story Enûma Eli-Š (Great Š), the universe was in a formless state and was described as a watery chaos. From it emerged two primary gods, a male and a female, and a third deity: the maker Mummu.

My meditations were interrupted by Ama's question: "Have you seen Leonardo's and Michelangelo's anatomical drawings that show their close study of human remains?"

"Yes, they are pretty amazing. Some of the taboos of our era are constantly being shaken," Ottavio's eyes shone with knowledge. "Human dissection, for scientific study, is now accepted and has become part of the scientific curriculum at various universities, enhancing our understanding of chemistry, medicine, and human anatomy."

"Standing at the entrance of the 16th century, Leonardo da Vinci's life is another example of the life of an ideal 'Renaissance man' — an all-round genius, a painter, a sculptor, a scientist, an architect, a philosopher, and a spiritual teacher with ideas that were far ahead of his time," Ama narrated this story. Leonardo was a man she admired greatly.

"Leonardo was an inventor with a mind set deep in the future but a body living here, amongst us." Ruben interrupted.

"A very inspiring soul. I heard he played the lyre..." Ottavio remarked.

"Not just that, he was an expert in botany, discussing war strategies with soldiers and the nature of life with truth-seekers. His observations of the motions of the stars, the path of the moon, and

the course of the sun are quite remarkable," Ama passed us each a cup of tea.

"A bit like you!" laughed Ottavio, sipping his tea slowly... Leaving Ottavio's place that day, walking through the streets of Macao, I contemplated the best ways to transfer these inspirational thoughts into my day-to-day reality.

Sunlight covered the ocean, and twilight brought magic into my vision. I saw petals closing their homes for the day, and ants hurrying back into their nests, saying goodnight to each other, while the wind whispered through the branches, its lullaby to the birds. I strongly felt that we, humans, are just a fraction of this miracle called life. As night crept upon me, I dived into the vastness of the stars, sensing their infinity and eternity, reflecting on my own unimportance.

As a mathematician, scientist, and researcher, the dogmas of my Church have never truly occupied my thoughts. Reading manuscripts by the most amazing minds, arguing that the Earth is not the centre of the Universe, nor the only planet with sentient beings, convinced me that our image of God had become distorted.

Long ago, somewhere deep within my mind, God lost his long white beard and his role as a parochial father who watches over his flock, counting their sins.

How small and insignificant we are. I caressed a flower.

The importance Christianity had attributed to us was obviously exaggerated, but the unimportance that opened up within this matrix of zero-mess, millions and millions of stars, and billions of lives, was dragging me into the oblivion of passivity, depression, and darkness.

To bring life back to my bones, I needed a mission, a purpose, a reason for living on this planet. Both Ama and Ottavio had a mission, and they both truly wanted me to be an essential part of it.

Love is life.
All, everything that I understand, I understand only
because I love.
Everything is, everything exists, only because I love.
Everything is united by it alone.
Love is God, and to die means that I,
a particle of love,
shall return to the general and eternal source.
Leo Tolstoy

A Man Training To Love

The Worship of Θεά

Ama is the embodiment of every man's desires. She represents our dreams of a perfect mother, a perfect lover, and a perfect companion. A gentle pearl, hidden in an oyster shell for so long that it became incredibly precious. Enchanted by her appearance, the sound of her voice, her scent, before I knew it, my soul's deepest dream became to lose myself in her arms, falling into the tender, loving light of her presence.

When I realised I was in love, it was far too late for any struggle my mind might have wished to put up.

She entered my world like a storm, and for months, perhaps even years, there was no room for anything else while she was around.

I saw her during the day, in the market, in front of the convent, amidst the crowds, in the temples, in sacred secret places — everywhere. I saw her even when I was away on missions, within the shadows of unknown women cast on the walls of ruined houses, smiling at me from the statues of Chinese Goddesses, in the shape of lotus petals floating in the lake, in the silhouettes of stones on my way to the college, in my dreams, and in my dreams…

If you have ever been in love, you might understand the madness my mind was going through — the

constant whisper that followed me through sleepless nights, the hope of catching a glimpse of her, while fearing that someone might notice my fixation on her stories, habits, thoughts, and dreams.

Being a priest in love only deepened my excitement and enchantment with this special soul, and prolonged my agony in consciously admitting that the butterflies in my stomach and my profound adoration of all she said and did, were my flesh's response to Amor's arrow, which had found its way deep into my subconscious mind.

Convinced that I knew my path, I walked steadily, not giving up, with the resolve of a man with completely set beliefs. A steady iron box was my life.

"The box that's surrounded you for the last 20 years," Ama said jokingly, "is very hard to break."

The chemistry inside my brain waged wars against my neurons and their well-established pathways. My princess was wide awake, painfully conscious of her prince's darkness and fears. Still fully dressed in my warrior's armour, ready to protect her from her sins, I found myself confused by her lean, graceful figure, elegantly floating through the air, and by her mind, full of mental acrobatics, which skilfully transformed my efforts to 'convert her' into little explosions of many dogmas within my heart. Afraid to touch her, lest my earthly touch break the spell and make her

vanish, disappearing into the realms of angels, I took a step back.

"What about your emotions?" she asked teasingly. "Can they be rounded, or are they also square?"

A warrior without armour, shy, clumsy, and soft in her presence, I longed deeply to abandon the role of a spiritual teacher and disappear into her arms and her amazing Lightness of Being.

"The feelings I have for you," I asserted, "are not sexual. I feel the purity of the spiritual connection between us."

We became friends in a spontaneously loving moment, laughing — a laughter that hurt me because I didn't know what to do with it.

"Ruben, how can you talk about sexuality when you've celebrated celibacy all your life?" she teased.

The only thing I knew about sex was what was written in the manuals that condemned it.

"The connection between our souls feels everlasting, spiritual, and intense."

Yet, the sexual energy — considered by some as a gift from God or the most beautiful way to merge with Spirit — was not my direct experience. Taoists

believe that joining with the Essence is the most profound spiritual exercise.

Ama took my hand and caressed it with the utmost gentleness.

Some months later, I insisted, "I don't need physical contact with you to feel complete," caressing the curls of her hair. Just breathing the air she breathed was enough to open my heart.

If I had lied, it was because I did not know of other realities, believing that the sin of carnal lust and the subtle worlds of love were set apart by the widest and deepest gap imaginable.

The flow passing through me was precious, vibrant, and its vitality rediscovered me. This delicate vibration could sustain me without food or movement for hours and days.

I was in love!

During my morning walks, I could see a conscious ant struggling to find its way through a maze, determined to stop the Earth from turning its seasons into a deadly winter that might kill its entire family.

When I saw a sparrow in love, building the most beautiful nest for its mate beside the Church, I felt the desire for Ama awaken within my soul, descending from the dream's astral worlds to the

terrestrial spheres. The energy awakening within me brought a physical sensation of thousands of roaring lions, filling my heart with the soft and fluid touch of Love.

I would examine the petals or my hands, sometimes for hours, admiring God's creations. Slowing down, my soul wandered within clouds of imagination. I imagined her walking, dancing, and disappearing into the Light. I pondered her words like a bee circling a flower for days, constantly returning to experience the essence of its nectar, powerfully self-absorbed, obsessed at times, yet still able to meet people truly. The Lady Love had opened me to God and His creation.

Physically, her touch went deep through my skin, into the core of my being, my bowels, stomach, and spine. Mentally, she took me into a space where there was neither breath nor movement.

Dark Blue was the world around me. Dark Blue took me to the end and the beginning of all known creation. Dark Blue were her feet, her eyes, her body, and our merge was reflected on the iron mirror opposite the bed that refused to acknowledge any boundaries, leaping through the illusion of time and the dimension of spacelessness.

Dark Blue was my first orgasm, which shook the Earth and awakened my ancestors, peacefully asleep for centuries. Dark Blue were my feelings of rediscovery of myself through this disappearance,

engraving into every single cell of my body the recollection of personal history. Dark Blue was her stomach that I kissed, lost within all possible realities of being.

Taking the dark blue silk and covering her naked body, the man within me — the one with a strong personal history, strong habits, and beliefs, the man in a box — felt the box rattling under the tremendous pressure of a soul's yearning for freedom. "I believe in what I preach." I muttered this, holding on to the only thing my mind could grasp, after our naked bodies had separated from an eternal embrace.

At that moment, when my mind reasserted itself, I almost should have felt guilty. The "I am" needed to reassert itself, pushing through this strange and uncharted territory.

Leaning forward and looking straight into her eyes, I repeated more determined, "I do believe in what I preach."

Staring at her silent, naked beauty, I vanished into her gaze once more. To love her was to love all of humanity. We merged again into a timeless motion, into an Essence that bore no name other than Light. Our bodies swayed together in the dance of creation — of Shiva and Shakti exploring their primal union.

"Am I still the man I used to be?" I asked, hours later. "Can I go back to the Monastery and live the way I once did?"

Just a moment ago, God, Jesus, the Holy Church, had been the essence of my life, and they had told me — that I should believe in mortal sin and the forgiveness of sin, that I was a sinner and should ask for forgiveness.

Yet now, in this Union, I felt that nothing but Love existed.

Two Rubens now lived within me: one who found peace in Silence, who explored prayer and Nature endlessly, detached from trivial pursuits, and another who, not yet understanding the essence of his struggle, questioned everything. This second Ruben found himself lost in futile arguments, wrestling with an irresolvable question: Why did God give me this path? He lost faith, brooding in depression, mistrusting his Authorities. Intolerant, nervous, and quarrelsome, he hesitated between his strengths and weaknesses.

Through Love, I lost Purpose — the very purpose that led me to priesthood that guided me to China, and that had been my force of life since my youth. Helping people understand Christianity and finding Ama had put my earthly mission in question. By giving me Love, God had taken away everything I once fought for.

One night, after a profound union with Ama that had lasted for hours, I fell asleep in Ama's Temple. A woman appeared in my dreams, standing above my headrest. I called her Purpose.

"Remember," I said, touching her forehead, "Life is not just a string of days to be lived mechanically. Life is our attempt to awaken and arouse the divinity within us. To receive this precious gift, you must die and be reborn."

Suddenly, a cupid appeared from nowhere, delivering a message. The two seemed not to get along.

"My Mistress Venus appears," the cupid mused, "and if you're not careful, she will disappear as quickly as she entered your life. She will take your heart, your mind, your body, and juggle them in an infinite play. Be warned — she may bring her brothers, jealousy, passion, and desire, to test your attachment to her family. If you offer her the mud of your existence, she may vanish before your eyes, wither, and die. But if she gives you the gift of Universal birth, you will experience the fullness of awareness."

That night, I woke up feverish, wishing to shake off the words that echoed in my mind, wanting to bury them in the subconscious darkness of my deepest worries or escape into the oblivion of someone else's thoughts. But they did not vanish.

"It is not difficult to love," I stood, hesitating, caressing the grass beneath my feet. "Nature loves while it breathes. Love is all around. Or is it?"

How could this profound feeling — this indestructible state of being — ever disappear, be forgotten, or be misused, taken for granted, abused? Impatiently rejecting an opportunity to observe the birds waking up, I returned to the Monastery.

Afraid to think that I might ever let go of this mesmerizing beauty, I glanced into my future.

Tuned to an abyss that stubbornly forgets, something whispered into my ear:

Afraid to lose her,

Afraid to hurt her,

Afraid to disappoint her,

Afraid to lose her…

Fear will kill your love…

A river had materialized before me — a raindrop carried by a cloud, circling above mountains, absorbed by a source, becoming a livelier stream, uniting with others, all flowing towards the same goal: the sea. When my drop was certain it could grow no bigger, no better, the sea merged with

another to form an ocean. Eventually, all the oceans came together and became one great mass of water on Earth. What an incredible journey!

My drop carried within it, from its birth, the potential to become part of something greater. Along the way, it could have disappeared, evaporated, and returned to the cloud. Yet it was never the same, yet always One.

One night, sitting together, looking deeply into each other's eyes, touching ever so slightly, my palms were lost in hers. My breath followed hers into non-breathing, non-existence, into the core of Life.

Vibrating with every cell of my being, this sacred flow, my mind dissolved into the web of eternity, fully conscious of every movement around me.

At that moment, I was no longer afraid of Death. Breaking through my boundaries and ego structures, Ama taught me Love.

The dance we performed that night, the Maya dance, was called the Dance of Life. We touched the centre of the circle of existence, following the wheel of destiny. Entering the spiral, we became the magic that separates us mortals from Angels, Gods, and Spirits.

Lapis — the sacred stone that transforms metals into gold — transferred us from the semi-conscious states of mortals into realms of meditation and

Light. This was the Tao transformation, or the awakening of Kundalini, they called it.

Broken into millions of pieces, I was the journey from a single drop into the ocean and back to the drop again. That evening, when we met in the gardens of her café, I whispered:

"Before I met you, I could not imagine non-existence. It was beyond me to comprehend that 'I' in any form of consciousness could cease to exist. I wish to die and be reborn again. I pray for a new beginning within my so distant worlds..."

"Are you loving me or leaving me?" she asked puzzled.

Holding her, I felt her shiver — fragile, delicate, and brittle. She was afraid to lose me, and I wanted her to stop me, to direct me into her eternal embrace. Yet, I feared this would not happen. I feared she would let me fly in whichever direction I chose, even if it meant losing me.

"If you choose me," I whispered, "we could transform metals into gold within every soul we touch. We could prove that it is possible to live Love, even with all the obstacles this choice demands. The world of Love has opened its doors to you, and you have been privileged to enter. Will you now abandon it all?"

The return road burned, and the flames roared.

"Whoever enters knows how difficult it is to get in. You are treated as an honoured guest. Love gives you powers — to foresee the future, understand the past, heal, or manifest things. But it takes courage to enter the door of knowledge. It takes even more to live it. Carrying the responsibility of such a Divine gift may be too heavy to bear."

The ducks across the stream stared at me, their radiant colours gleaming as they joyfully played with the water, competing for the attention of their mates. God's creation, in all its forms, laughed at me.

The yellow fields of flowers reminded me of my childhood and my mother, who had died when I was four. The yellow of the flowers mixed peace and melancholy, memories that lacked full recognition or clarity.

My happiness was firmly grounded in this material world, in its eternal playful game. And I was undoubtedly attached to its allure.

The grass taught me eternity, the rules of life’s simplicity — born to die, disappear, vanish into Nirvana, only to be reborn from the ashes hidden in the Earth.

As a Jesuit priest, with a path to follow, God to guide me, and converts to lead, it was difficult to admit that "I" was still deeply rooted in habits and selfishness. I was walking a path still far from God.

Helping save the poor unbelievers, I had separated people into "us" and "them." The more I labelled them — Christians, Buddhists, Atheists, Pagans — the more I drained strength from the body of Christ that lived within me.

Entering the Church's embrace, what seduced me most was not power or money — Jesuits don't ask for money and live ascetic lives — but the knowledge that opened its chambers to me. The chamber of knowledge was full of toys, distractions, and goods. It was bewildering, amusing, and kept me occupied for hours, days, years, even decades. It could have occupied me for a lifetime.

But many devils slept in that chamber, hidden behind veils of superiority, control, arrogance, and self-importance.

Forever, I will remember that night…

"A bad thought will increase in power and overcome you before you realize the darkness approaching from behind," Ama had said, turning to one of the people in the room, taking his hand with gentle power. "He exercises this quality very strongly."

The person she was speaking of was a rough, self-educated Dutchman. He had appeared from nowhere, staying with them for reasons only God knew. He was strong, silent, withdrawn into his misty world. His eyes, if you ever looked into them, spelled trouble.

His movements were harsh, and he had no name — Ama called him Krishna, Milarepa, Eagle, Iskon, Aron — whatever he wished at the time. When she introduced him, she told us he was her angel. I was jealous of the connection between them.

Leaving Ama that evening, a thought haunted me — the obscurity of her choice. What a scavenger's life he had, no family, no place to call his own. What troubled me most was the inkling I couldn't forget, that he might, one day, be her lover. That possibility was undeniable.

Jealousy took root inside me, growing with astonishing speed, until my mind played endless games on me. Soon, I hated that man she had mentioned.

It took a sleepless night, a day of love, conversation, and walks with Ama to realize the whirlpool of negative emotions I was caught in. I was humbled by the experience.

They say angels sing when you tell the truth to yourself and to those around you. I could not hear mine. A Jesuit, a preacher, a priest, a Portuguese in Macao, just a man at the beginning of his journey… I had decided to break the chains of my attachments.

Father Benedict, a middle-aged, grey-haired man with blue eyes, had spent many moons in prayer and meditation. He saw Ama's vision as his own mission. I could have joined Ottavio and Father

Schall in reforming the Calendar, translating books, becoming part of their task, but I could not.

Through my life, I followed the teachings of my spiritual teachers — superiors, the Pope, Ama — but I didn't know how to Be.

Awake in the middle of the night, walking through the woods, I prayed, wishing to stop the wheel of fortune from turning. Perhaps I did believe in suffering. Maybe the world of happiness, love, and togetherness was not yet mine. Jesus had suffered for humanity. Perhaps my pain was meant to strengthen the rest of the world?

Fighting alongside others against the Dutch, standing shoulder to shoulder against death, was easy. Defending Ama from the attacks of my superiors, short-minded priests, and suspicious citizens who called her a witch, was easy.

Fighting against myself — my deep need to refuse happiness and accept suffering as the way of being — that was completely different.

"I will pray for you," she had said.

And so I walked away...

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

Lao Tze Tung

Ama's Mother

A Tale of an African Shaman

Kenya is where I was born, in a tribe today known as the Pokot. The Pokot people are part of the larger 'Kalenjin' group, and today, they are renowned for their athletic prowess, often dominating even the toughest races.

As the daughter of a tribal chief, I was initiated into the secrets of magic and the sacred life of trees. By the time I was 18, I had earned the status of Medicine Woman within my tribe.

I had a unique perspective of our world — an intimate circle surrounded by an expansive oval of green turf. But this was no ordinary night. The moon, rising in its last quarter, cast a twilight haze across the landscape. As the darkness settled, it was replaced by an almost sacred silence.

I stood still, listening to the quiet hum of the night. Then, I turned my gaze upward to see a seagull gliding gracefully through the air. It was the same bird that had once soared beside me, always keeping pace with my morning runs. I knew its path by heart. This time, it did not recognize me. Once, we had run together every morning. Now, he was a stranger.

I took a step closer, watching him. He was no longer the one they called a murderer. Time had transformed him into a lonely traveller, a roadman

with no family — just a man of dust and fear. As I approached, he tensed. His eyes widened, and in a panic, he stumbled back, terrified, mistaking me for a wild animal.

“Bung!” I heard him mutter, backing away, his heart racing.

With some effort, I turned to face him fully, my back aching from the movement. He froze, unsure, as our gazes met.

“We used to run together down the valley, didn’t we?” I asked gently, my voice soft but steady.

His breath caught, and for a moment, I saw a flicker of recognition in his eyes. Then, with a quiet, almost hesitant nod, he leaped forward, following me as I moved, my fading light a distant guide in the dark. He kept his distance but watched closely, unsure yet trusting.

There was no mention of the boats, or the men they’d seen on the mainland, the ones with their fire sticks and strange ways. The quiet was all-encompassing.

In Africa, gods and people exist side by side. God is everywhere, and Nature is His supreme manifestation. The sun and the moon are His eyes.

As I sat beside the crystals, I asked for guidance, but found little — save for one word: "cross."

"I suppose if absolutely necessary, something could be done," I pondered aloud, uncertain of what the future held but resolute in my commitment to whatever path lay ahead.

Three days later, three months, three seasons passed. Ottavio, ever watchful, observed me with a knowing smile. His eyes were steady, bright as he spoke.

"I've heard you healed the captain from malaria during your journey from Africa to Portugal," he said, his voice calm yet filled with an unspoken understanding. "You are the one I've been waiting for."

His eyes confirmed it — his words, his gaze, all spoke of a deeper knowing. I could not deny the truth in his words, though I had yet to fully grasp its weight.

When I died, as a spirit, I protected our precious daughter, Ama, guarding her sleep from disturbed ghosts. I whispered ancient chants to keep her safe from the nightmares that came, restless and hungry.

And when the attack on Macao came, I stood at the edge of the world, part of the wind and storm. I was there when the first cannon fired against the Dutch — my spirit in every echo of that thunderous roar. The great storm that followed, terrifying the Chinese and leading to the release of Father Schall, was not

entirely in my hands. But I was part of it, a force of nature, a shadow in the storm.

Now, my spirit resides in the inner chamber atop the Obelisk of Axum, a 24-meter-tall monument, built in 400 AD, weighing 160 tons, in the city of Axum, Ethiopia. This obelisk, or Hawelt in Ge'ez, has served for centuries as a marker for underground burial chambers — some of which are royal tombs.

At the top of the stele, a small house-like object is carved in relief, believed by Ethiopians to house the original Ark of the Covenant. Axum is a World Heritage site, rich with major archaeological treasures, including the stelae and a royal necropolis that stretches toward Mount Saint George and Mount Mariam.

Local legend holds that the Queen of Sheba’s palace once stood in Axum, and one of the giant stelae marks her burial site. The obelisks themselves are breath-taking — solid granite monolithic blocks, weighing several hundred tons, raised and embedded deep in the earth.

As for Ama, like any mother, I protected my daughter as best I could. I guarded her sleep from disturbed spirits, ensuring she had the peace she deserved. I directed the first cannon against the Dutch during the fateful attack on Macao, and the great storm that terrified the Chinese, leading to Father Schall's release, was woven into my work.

When I passed, Ottavio guided me. And when he passed, I guided him. When Ama passed — if she truly passed — only Light filled the heavens. No trace of attachment remained, just pure, undisturbed Light..

'...as there is no truth which is not joined or opposed to what is false, so there is no love without fear, ardour, jealousy, rancour, and other passions, which proceed from their opposites, and which disturb us, as the other opposite causes satisfaction. Thus the soul striving to recover its natural beauty seeks to purify itself, to heal itself, and to reform itself, and to this end it uses fire, because, being like gold, mixed with earth and crude, with a certain rigour it tries to liberate itself from defilement, and this result is obtained when the intellect, the real smith of love, puts itself to the work and causes an active exercise of the intellectual powers.'

Giordano Bruno

Chronology of a Minor Famine in 17th Century China

The virus that has attacked us was a minor one. Yet who can imagine panic who has not lived through one?

We may have known sickness of various forms yet this one came in a burst of many people's thoughts all passed to us through various media. This was a minor virus with a death count not larger than norm...

Who can imagine the panic of a city? The panic of the suburbs, the great sweep of fear and the anxious eyes of the stomach twisting.

Still, they say this famine was a minor one, no more than one of many that struck the humanity so many times before. The temples have closed and the royals did stop the public audiences, and the grand procession was cancelled. The one who died, for the most part, only the aged, or the ones with an underlying condition, a weak heart or a smoky chest, along the ones weakened by other illness or by loss of hope.

Just Before

The market emptied early with the good folk carrying off expensive purchases and the others going off with extra food, safe for another day. Public gatherings and wedding feasts were

postponed or cancelled with gold prices rise, for we all know that it is good to purchase gold when the World falls down. Or as someone else has wisely said: Fear and hunger breeds revolution.

"There is a big war coming", said the wise woman observing the spread.

Plump bodies grew bigger, for the lack of moving, and thin ones stronger, for no movement was allowed.

The shops, the owners, the glittering entertainment industry will soon rise above its losses, will recover and grow fat again. Perhaps it is possible for us to imagine a minor panic.

Now this is where our experiences diverge in two, the ones who could and the ones who could not re-fill the empty balls. Some of us have also gone through a minor famine, listening to the wailing of children or a grumpy wife with their stomachs twisting in pain. We might or might not be able to fill that gap, the gap between a earth-quake that has caused the minor famine, in a minor kitchen of a minor few, who have lost their half legal professions or closed their, just managed to open barber shops.

"Now is the right time for the practice of Compassion, do it in steps: remember yourself, exercise, and contemplate." I've heard one of the Moon Ladies on our little Planet alter.

Some time before -

The 7th day of the 7th lunar month is the end of the rainy season in China, the time of harvest, the time of the Night called All Souls Night was the night of the great earth-quake.

Some tales ought to be told and told again, re-vibrating the same truths over and over, for if it's not our flesh to hurt, we think the pain to be just a game in a rehearsal of life.

Some tales ought to be told quickly, as a glance or dance over an ice-coated river, for we, souls incarnated to learn, cannot absorb them into our Being just as yet, for our aura floods with different colours.

Children have deep longing to believe that World is based on Truth and only parents have the true respect for that longing. The orphans in any city will tell you many tales, most of them myths, half-truth, half lies, for it is only the myth that can protect their fragile souls from the colours of the reality. Within their family mythology or constellation they managed to live beyond the ordinary, becoming extra-ordinary... Now, they had no problems imagining a famine, even a small one, run chills up their spines. For each encounter of a man, was the one of disorderly causes and effects by no mean predictable effects.

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures.

Riot police clash with market traders.

Traders shouted "The King must go".

Thousands of people thronged the country suffer.

'End of the world'

A powerful earthquake has struck north of China's capital, damaging buildings, burying vehicles in rubble and causing several fires.

The major earthquake strikes all of China.

Prime Minister said the earthquake was the biggest in the last 140 years.

Several fires were also reported. Residents without homes sleep on the squares.

Soldiers wearing masks and carrying shovels could be seen helping efforts to clear the damage on the streets.

The overcrowded housing, a lack of sewage systems, and unsafe drinking water. Government sees

"Overcrowding is a huge issue,"

People are relatively isolated, they have inadequate access to healthcare, the housing is after the disaster crowded… food insecurity is an issue and certainly unemployment rates – those all act to make people more vulnerable.

This is a "crisis waiting to happen,"

'God's punishment':

"God told me through his holy book, Quran, to urge people to refrain from sin. Our bad deeds will be punished. The earth-quake is God's punishment," A man surrounded by a small crowd said.

Several states have declared states of emergencies and ordered the closures of businesses.

We have declared a national emergency. The governance has been under fire for all the issues that the country has faced.

The Buddhist Temple is turning into a giant warehouse as a base to store food and other essential items which will be delivered by a team of volunteers.

This is casing the Great Recession.

Earlier this month the Government has released prisoners to help reduce the risk of the diseases spreading in its prisons.

Global hunger could double due to the Earth-quakes all through the countries.

Some residents continue to live in tents more than 18 months after the triple disaster of earth-quake, fire and disease.

In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs

This disease has targeted those with the poorest health.

Many moons before in the parallel Universe called Earth...

Li Po was an artist, a painter, my Chinese language teacher, and a guide through the vast expanse of Chinese culture and its way of thinking. This small, ancient-looking gentleman was surprisingly vital, with a white beard and long white hair tied in a ponytail. Educated in Peking, he had settled in Macao and now ran a studio where he taught the art of Chinese brushwork.

One of the first major conflicts between the Catholic Church and Chinese authorities occurred in 1616, when Shen Huai, a high-ranking official in Nanjing, advised the Emperor to ban Catholicism. The tensions between Chinese customs, such as Confucianism and ancestor worship, and Catholic practices like baptism sparked the anti-Christian movement. Shen Huai arrested dozens of

missionaries for questioning, accusing Catholicism of undermining Chinese respect for parents and ancestors, which he considered a great sin. Fueled by this Anti-Catholic sentiment, Emperor Wenli enacted a law deporting all foreign missionaries back to their homelands.

This conflict over Chinese customs was also reflected in the disagreement about Christian terminology. Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit missionary, sought to bridge this gap by adopting Confucian practices, referring to God as Tian Zhu (Ruler of Heaven) or simply Tian (Heaven). However, after Ricci's death, some missionaries argued that these terms could not adequately represent God and insisted on using Latin terminology exclusively.

In the Jesuit movement, we understood the sensitivity of this issue and allowed our Chinese converts to continue their ancestor worship. The Augustinians, however, disagreed and banned this deeply ingrained tradition, deeming it heretical. This created significant tensions with the Chinese government.

After a cup of tea — something Li Po always seemed to find an excuse for — we would wander around his gardens, discussing Chinese gods, spirits, and the philosophical underpinnings of Chinese thought.

"Chinese culture hosts many different gods, spirits, and myths," Li Po began, his voice calm and reflective. "We believe that everything is spiritual:

wood, stones, animals — they are all manifestations of spiritual energy, which we call Chi."

"We believe that everything reflects its divine origin," he continued. "A stick, a house, a blade of grass, the earth, or a star — they are all expressions of the same source. Because of their divine nature, we give them all the attention and respect they deserve."

In pursuit of happiness and harmony, Chinese philosophers, much like the ancient Greeks and Egyptians, carefully studied the mysterious influences of nature. They observed the stars, the earth, and compared the essences of different elements.

"For centuries, the Chinese have studied the pulses of the earth to learn how to choose the most auspicious locations and times for activities," Li Po explained. "Through this complicated system, one can tell when harmony has been achieved or when it has been disturbed."

"For example," he continued, "if someone suddenly falls ill, it is almost certain that the cause will be found in the disturbed energy of the area." He paused before adding, "Disagreeing with Tao brings suffering. If a man disturbs the flow of a valley or a river, the insulted element will seek revenge, causing illness or misfortune."

Li Po smiled as he added, "Chinese gods are not always benevolent. They can be moody, with peculiar personalities, and sometimes they bring suffering. They are responsible for calamities, disasters, and disharmony. But we respect them all — the benevolent ones and those that create disorder."

As in any other society, China was divided into those who followed blindly and an educated minority who defined the moral code. The hundreds of fortune-tellers and roadside oracles I saw on the streets and marketplaces were primarily entertainment for the masses.

"The book at the core of early Chinese philosophical thought, shared by both Confucianism and Taoism, is the Yi Jing," Li Po said, bringing out an ancient edition of the text. We would study this book together in the years to come. It was a true work of art, crafted by famous calligraphers.

Confucius had written a commentary on the Yi Jing around 500 BC, and his wise words became the ethical foundation for Chinese kings and society.

"We believe that spirit and matter are two aspects of the same thing," Li Po explained. "Spirit is inherent in matter, and change is inherent in the cosmic order."

The original meaning of the character Yi (易) is the lizard, which changes its colour to adapt to its

surroundings. It is a combination of the sun (日, Yang) and the moon (月, Yin). Yi has three core meanings: Simplicity — the fundamental law underlying the universe is simplicity; Change — the universe is in a constant state of change; and Persistency — there is a central rule that remains constant despite the fluctuations of space and time. Jing (經) means scripture, sutra, or great teaching.

The Yi Jing reflects the universe in miniature. Each hexagram, composed of six lines (either solid [Yang] or broken [Yin]), illustrates a different aspect of the cosmic Chi and the subtle interplay between Yin and Yang. The book contains 64 hexagrams, each representing a different facet of life, with the entire system covering the spectrum of human experience.

Everything in nature manifests either through Heavenly Father (Yang) or Mother Earth (Yin). Yang is strong, pure, and vigorous, while Yin is gentle, feminine, flexible, and patient. Yin nurtures and sustains life. Balance is achieved when Yin and Yang are in harmony.

To help me better understand the concept of Yin and Yang, which is so deeply ingrained in Chinese thought, Li Po guided me through the two fundamental hexagrams of the Yi Jing — Qian and Kun. Qian represents heaven, and Kun represents earth. Together, they symbolize the birth of the entire creation.

As my thoughts drifted, my research led me to a collection of alchemical manuscripts by George Ripley, a 15th-century alchemist from Yorkshire. Ripley was in pursuit of the Philosopher's Stone, and his writings and illustrations delve into mystical themes, the hermaphroditic nature of the universe, Kundalini awakening, and the sacred movement towards perfection. The alchemical drawings I studied, alongside Ripley's poems such as Verses upon the Elixir and Boast of Mercury, depicted the processes involved in creating the Philosopher's Stone, encoded in pictorial cryptograms.

Forgive me if I digress, but I must satisfy your ever-curious thirst for knowledge. My research into Ripley's manuscripts took me from the channels of Cam, through the hills of Edinburgh, and into the castles of Oxford. These rare alchemical texts opened up an ancient world where the mysteries of creation and transformation were passed down in esoteric symbols and images.

Now, this Ripley's Scroll shows seven stages of transformation: an egg-shaped vase, grey in colour, capable of becoming any shape, colour or form, full of sperm-like tadpoles released by a huge green frog, presumably in water, as eggs that hatch and, through their growth, develop limbs and lungs, undergoing the most amazing metamorphosis.

Eight of the mandalas, seven depicting alchemical experiments, while the eighth is a Biblical scene of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge. The scroll continues exploring the story of Adam and Eve: they

stand in water, surrounded by seven alchemists with their transformational processes. At the top of the Tree of Knowledge is a naked woman with a dragon's tail, bearing the inscription "Speritu", holding a child with "Anima" hanging from the branches, caressing the naked boy. This is followed by Adam with the sign of the Sun and Eve, who worships the Moon, standing beside the Tree of Knowledge, observed by the serpent and the alchemists.

This scene is centred on the Sun and Moon, facing each other, each with feathers, which totally reminded me of the Chinese Yin and Yang.

The original meaning of Qian is the brilliant sunshine at sunrise. It inspires all life, making it prosperous. The hexagram Qian has six masculine and solid lines. Its symbol is the dragon. The dragon is a sacred animal; it represents the prestige of the king. It is dynamic, as is the power of Nature; it is comfortable both in water and in the sky. Qian is essentially about creativity, benevolence and righteousness.

The image of Kun is the earth. It represents pure femininity. Earth creates the world and nourishes it. The entire creation depends on it for nurture and growth. Kun is symbolised by a female horse — galloping without limits towards the horizon, with tenderness and submissiveness as its main qualities.

"This book never fails to grant us access to eternity," contemplated Li Po.

And how exactly does it work? I wondered.

"We follow a meditation ritual to calm our minds and gain access to our inner selves. We focus on the relevant issue, ask a question or request a guideline from the book, and its answer inspires our intuition to define the correct course of action."

"Does that mean that the answer is already within us?" I asked.

"Correct," he confirmed.

"That means we could be using any book?"

He smiled. "Nearly all the greatest minds of China used this book or have written an interpretation of its text," he said, avoiding a direct answer. "The wisdom of thousands of years is within the Yi Jing. Why would you seek another book?"

"Correct," I smiled...

"Talking about ceremonies!" He exclaimed. "Please now do join me for my tea ceremony!"

We spent lots of time in his studio, a clean, uncluttered, and peaceful place that inspired my friend's work. The studio had a large desk filled with

ink-stones, rolls of paper, some finished and unfinished paintings, bamboo brushes, and beautifully carved holders. The coloured dishes and a fresh flower floating in one of the water bowls regularly acknowledged my presence.

Li Po was famous for his calligraphy — the art of drawing Chinese characters.

It took me time and patience to convince him to teach me calligraphy because his artist's mind saw this quasi-effort of mine as a waste of time. Teaching a foreigner, a Westerner, who expected to learn something about this sacred art in less than a lifetime, seemed foolish. But I didn't relent. I continued to ask, to show my determination, my respect for the craft, and eventually, he gave up his fight. With a resigned sigh and a quiet chuckle, he opened for me a little paradise into the art of this ancient science.

Carefully observing my friend and teacher paint in front of me, I would watch his every stroke, his movements, and the way he held the brush — delicate, poised, yet controlled. Each stroke, each line, held meaning. His brush danced with the paper, and every motion seemed intentional, not just in creating characters but in creating a rhythm, a balance between chaos and order. What he wanted me to get from this observation were not merely the technicalities, but the feeling, the mood, the mental state behind each symbol.

“Each character is a living entity,” he would say, his eyes intense, “with its own energy, its own force that awakens within the drawing of the symbol. Each sentence, each line, is a poem, a meditation, a prayer. A combination of characters that cannot be taken lightly.”

He drew only extracts from sacred texts — Buddhist sutras, Taoist principles, Confucian wisdom — each one infused with the essence of centuries. The brush strokes seemed to capture not just ink on paper, but the very spirit of the words.

When the lesson was over, I would take his paintings home, sit down in quiet contemplation, and try to absorb the lessons hidden in each character. Hours would pass as I copied them meticulously. The act of copying wasn't merely an exercise in reproducing shapes; it was a way to connect deeply with the wisdom embedded within those symbols. I brought my copies back the next day, my work covered in smudges and slight imperfections, waiting for his critique.

“You see,” he would say, running his fingers over my attempts, “the strokes are not just lines; they are the pulse of life. Feel the rhythm of the character. Can you hear it? It speaks to you.”

I would nod, although much of the feeling was still elusive to me. Copying characters over and over again, my hand began to learn the motions, the techniques, the delicate balance of the brush. The

symbols began to feel familiar, like old friends that whispered ancient truths to me, if only I could learn to listen.

But it wasn't just the mechanics of writing. It was as if with each stroke I was sinking deeper into the subconscious wisdom of each symbol. I wasn't just studying; I was participating in something greater than myself. Through this practice, I was offering my intellect to the higher intuitive force that had lived within these characters for thousands of years.

There were moments when I would almost forget the paper before me and feel that the brush itself was guiding me — leading my hand, shaping my mind.

I remember asking my teacher one day, "Why is it that every character is so complex? In the West, we have an alphabet with just a few letters to form all our words, but here…" I trailed off, motioning to the many characters I had been practicing.

He smiled, his eyes softening. "In the West, letters are like building blocks. But here, characters are much more. They are concepts, living ideas captured in form. Each character tells a story, and the story changes depending on its context. They are not just marks on paper, Benedict. They are windows into the very nature of things."

I could only nod, still grasping at the edges of what he was describing.

"For the most basic use, and for reading the scripts, you need to master about 3,000 characters," my teacher said with amusement in his eyes, noting my wide-eyed reaction. "But I have spent decades, and there are still characters I encounter that I do not fully understand. The depth of the language is infinite. There is always more to learn."

"So, how many do you know?" I asked, curious about his own journey.

His smile deepened, but there was a hint of humility in it. "In this lifetime, perhaps a few thousand. But true mastery is not about knowing the most characters. It is about knowing the soul of each one—the essence they convey. Understanding that every brushstroke is an act of creation, and in every creation, there is truth. The characters speak to you if you are open to listen."

I was silent for a moment, pondering the vastness of what he had just said. To truly understand the language was to understand the universe itself. It was a way of thinking, a lens through which one saw all things, not merely as they were, but as they were meant to be. The characters, the strokes, were reflections of the very nature of existence.

"How long do you think it will take me to understand?" I asked, though I knew deep down that the answer was far from simple.

He chuckled, shaking his head. "A lifetime, Benedict. A lifetime. But the journey is worth it. The more you practice, the more the characters will open up to you. The more you listen, the clearer the language will become."

With that, I returned to my practice, but now it was not just about copying the symbols, not just about getting the form right. It was about listening. Listening to the brush as it met the paper, to the ink as it whispered its ancient knowledge, and to the universe as it spoke to me through the characters.

And though I knew that mastery would be a distant dream, I also understood that in this journey, there was something far more important than achieving perfection. It was the act of learning, of immersing oneself in the art, of connecting with something timeless that was already far beyond any one person. And in this understanding, I had already begun to receive the gift my teacher had tried to show me all along. "More than 30,000!" He laughed, leaving me with an amused wonderment about the numbers mentioned...

"We begin writing at the top of a page, on the right-hand side, and continue writing vertically. We also open our books from the side you consider to be the back side of the book."

"Speech and writing," Li Po explained, "both express the same impulse — the conveyance of thought, one through hearing, the other through sight. Speech is

followed by the music of words, while writing is there to liberate the beauty of symbols. The art of character writing is very sacred in China."

"Learning to draw Chinese characters," my teacher continued, "the most important thing is that 'Chi Yün' enters your heart. Chi Yün is spirit-vitality or life-breath of a painting. It is intangible, but unless it is born within your heart, you can copy the characters all your life and still not draw them correctly."

The relationship between Chinese and symbols is very profound.

"I've heard that some Daoist painters paint with their hair, achieving 'wild' curves and 'spontaneous' effects," I asked.

"For example, look at this reproduction of Wang Xizhi's famous work: The Introduction to the Orchid Pavilion. How beautiful, original, spontaneous, and rhythmic it is! Wang Xizhi lived around 300 AD, and he was a Chinese Sage of Calligraphy. Throughout China, his calligraphy is carefully collected and studied. This book was written during a poetry contest. He was a Governor, and he invited forty artists to this contest. After the event, he wrote the preface to accompany the poems within the book." Li Po was fascinated by this Sage.

What fascinated me even more within this little story was the poetry contest that happened almost two

thousand years ago. They gathered to write about life, to philosophise, to share their deeper insights, two thousand years ago, 300 years before Christ was born! Somehow, my mind could not grasp the thought of thousands of years in the past. Yet it has happened, and it has been recorded. We did exist; they shout from their graves, and we wrote poetry, drew characters, sat next to streams, laughing, drinking, exchanging, and then publishing it, for future generations, for posterity, showing teeth to mortality and its deadly bite of 'forgetfulness'.

"The oldest found records are our Oracle bone scripts," my teacher explained. "Symbols were first written with a brush and then inscribed with an animal bone tool."

I could imagine that a lot of original calligraphy did not survive because it was drawn on very fragile silk or paper. The ones that survived were mostly inscribed in stone or bamboo.

Li Po showed me a page bound together with bamboo sticks, all having vertical inscriptions that looked like columns.

"Important religious texts, like the Buddhist sutras, were engraved on the bamboos or rock faces of sacred mountains," he said, gently tracing the bamboo with his fingers. "It is believed that by engraving these words into the natural world, we are connecting heaven and earth."

"Like the one done on Mount Tai?" I remembered seeing this little interaction of people of our past and Nature, how they harmonized the sacred with the physical world.

"Yes," Li Po said, smiling slightly, "during those days, the copies of the entire Buddhist canon were commissioned by the Emperor. The most talented calligraphers did the work. It wasn't just about the text, but the beauty and sacredness of the characters themselves."

"It is a great honour for a calligrapher to be asked to do the scrolls," I remarked, thinking about the incredible craftsmanship required. "It's a sign of respect for the artist's potential."

Li Po nodded, his gaze distant, as though reflecting on the weight of the tradition. "Calligraphy is not just writing. It is a form of art, a way to express one's soul. In the best works, the brush strokes carry not only the words but the spirit of the writer."

Calligraphy has remained a potent force in Chinese life up to the present day. I studied the language, the symbols, the myths, because I wanted an insight into China's visual culture, into their customs, into their beliefs, for I was a scientist, not only to devise my own methods in converting Chinese into Christianity.

"As a means of visual communication, Chinese characters are fascinating in their ingenuity," I

mused. "They portray the philosophical idea behind the word itself."

Li Po gave me a knowing look, his voice quiet but rich with understanding. "Every character is a doorway, Benedict. Not just a symbol for a sound, but for an entire concept. You can see the heart of an idea in the way the character is formed. For example," he picked up a small scroll, pointing to a character, "'xin,' is a character for both 'heart' and 'mind.' We see heart and mind as one and the same thing. The heart is the source of all thoughts, not the head as you are accustomed to in the West."

I pondered this, feeling the depth of what Li Po was saying. "That's a profound way of seeing the world. It's as if all thought, emotion, and understanding originates from the heart."

He smiled, pleased with my reflection. "Yes. The state of mind flows from the heart. When you speak of personal insight or wisdom, you often use 'xin' as the central character, because it represents the seat of clarity."

"That's remarkable," I said, making a mental note. "The heart and mind, so connected."

Li Po then gestured toward another character. "Take this one — 'zheng.' It's an ideograph of a foot walking in a straight line, signifying arrival at the line, a proper limit without going astray. It means straight, upright, correct, exact. We use it in words

like ‘normal,’ ‘proper,’ ‘justice,’ and even ‘official.’ It embodies the concept of following a righteous path, of being true to one’s purpose.”

“I can see how that’s not just about walking physically but also about walking through life with integrity,” I said thoughtfully.

“Exactly,” Li Po agreed, his eyes alight with the joy of teaching. “Every character holds not just its literal meaning but a vision of how to live, how to behave.”

“‘Jian’,” I added, flipping through the characters, “this one is drawn as two spears shattering and destroying the value of shells. It conveys the idea of cheap, worthless things, and is also used to depict a poor and miserable person, correct?”

Li Po nodded. “Yes, it tells a story. It’s not just about the word. It’s the image behind the word that matters. It evokes the meaning through visual symbolism.”

“How do you say ‘beautiful’?” I asked, thinking it was a simple question during one of our lessons.

Li Po’s face softened with amusement as he paused, clearly contemplating the complexities of the concept. “Ah, ‘beautiful.’ In Chinese, the idea of beauty is not singular. There are many types of ‘beautiful.’ Beautiful as a flower, beautiful as a woman, beautiful within an art object, and so on. The word ‘beautiful’ does not properly define the

concept, which is as vast and deep as the ocean. That is why in our language, we use different ways to express all these types of beauty. We don't simplify such a magnificent notion by searching for one word."

I was fascinated. "So, beauty is not just a simple adjective — it's something that needs to be understood in context."

Li Po smiled, clearly enjoying my curiosity. "Exactly. Beauty, like life itself, is multifaceted. We give each form of beauty its own meaning, word, or symbol that is connected to what it represents. We do not merely label it."

The world of symbols doesn't live alone. It is interwoven with signs, imagination, superstitions, magic, and dreams. At the beginning of my stay in Macao, I went to a Chinese friend all set to make a good impression with a gift for my host—five packs of a precious and expensive black tea. The gift was met with whispers, giggles, and stares, the reaction a little confusing.

Li Po chuckled when I recounted this story. "Ah, the number 'five.' In your culture, it may seem simple enough, but in ours, it carries another meaning." He paused, letting the weight of the words settle. "The word 'wu,' which denotes the number five, also carries the meanings of evil, black, unhappy, and violent. It is a sign of disrespect to give five items as

a gift. In this case, your well-meaning gesture became an omen of misfortune."

I was stunned. "Five? I had no idea. And they took it lightly because I'm a foreigner?"

"Exactly," Li Po said. "Sometimes the meaning of symbols is lost in translation. But symbols are powerful, Benedict. They are alive, and they influence the world around us in ways we may not always see."

"A lucky direction brings success, while the unlucky one helps the rivals," I mused. "It must make meetings and negotiations very tricky — what if two people have conflicting luck directions?"

Li Po smiled wryly. "That's precisely why business meetings often get postponed for no apparent reason. One man's good fortune is another's misfortune. It's a delicate balance."

"Imagine," I said, "how difficult it must be to navigate all these symbols and meanings in daily life."

Li Po chuckled, then became serious. "It's not always easy, but it's the way the world works. We watch the sky all the time, listen to the sounds of nature, and heed the signs. The smallest change in the environment can reveal great truths about the future."

He looked at me intently, as if sharing a deeper secret. "On hearing a crow," he continued, "I could tell you your future. If it comes from the South in the early morning, you will receive a present; if mid-morning, rain will follow; at midday, there will be quarrels; in the afternoon, misfortune will come; and in the evening, a lawsuit awaits."

"That's extraordinary," I said, amazed by the breadth of knowledge embedded in these traditions. "So much can be known by listening to a crow."

"Only if you truly understand the signs," Li Po said quietly, as if his words themselves were part of a larger, hidden truth. My face couldn't hide an expression of complete disbelief. Li Po smiled:

"This must sound like a lot of gibberish to your mind. However, Nature continuously presents us with signs. Your point about our free will is true. Personally, I hear the signs, but I don't let them rule my life unless there is an important happening, such as building a new home or choosing a wedding day for your beloved children. When building a home, we obey rituals that take care of the direction of the main door, the time of year, favourite and disturbing winds, trees, and house surroundings. The lucky day will lead to descendants, to finding a hidden treasure, or a promotion to a higher office."

Many believe that if an unlucky day or an unfavourable place is chosen for a burial, it might lead to calamities and epidemics in the family for

years after the funeral. This belief led to quite an abuse by many so-called experts who determined the luckiest date or place for a burial. You can imagine people refusing to bury their loved ones in fear that they do not get it right. The government had to stop this motion because of the disease that spread from such places and the chaos that was created in an attempt to ensure the best burial places...

"Many found ways to abuse the superstitions, earning their fortune from the misfortune and stupidity of others. But fools are universal—they can be found in all countries..."

This mixture of what my mind called superstitious gibberish and the serenity of my host sent a shiver down my spine. I did not want to argue or frighten my host, such a gentle and honest person. I humbly took the role of a student, listening attentively and absorbing his words.

"This amazing mix of values gave birth to Chinese Christians whose beliefs are quite a bizarre mix, don't you think?" I asked Li Po, a question that had been on my mind for some time.

"You will have no problems converting the Chinese into Christians, as long as we could also worship other gods. Is that acceptable to you? Christ is welcomed into our houses if it is surrounded by the God of Fertility, the God of Death, and the God of Harvest. If there is to be any success in conversion

to Christianity, you have to let Chinese Christians continue with their ancestor worship." I felt that Li Po was right.

Staying faithful to one God, we, Church Officials, have declared all Chinese gods non-existent, a culture so connected to worship was dismissed as that of non-believers.

"This is indeed a cause of many debates between the missionaries in China," I told Li Po.

"You have a strong reputation in Europe and here in China for your knowledge of astrology, astronomy, and mathematics. This reputation could become your strongest weapon. Some of the manuscripts that you have written and translated have reached and impressed the Court. The educated classes of China will listen to your words with respect." Li Po naturally bowed while talking about my work at university.

Living in Macao, at the crossroads of eras, walking from the Dark Ages to the Age of Science, I was creating a bridge between two systems of thought — science and religious belief — each carrying within them the wisdom of their ancestors. My mission became to make this wisdom available to anyone who had ears to hear and eyes to see. It was no small task, for the world was changing rapidly, and not everyone was ready to embrace the future.

“There are many paths leading to One,” I mused, as I walked beside Ama, collecting herbs in the fields of Macao. Her presence was calming, and as she bent down to gently pull a plant from the earth, I felt the connection between us deepen. “These herbs carry within their fragile essence a secret of Life, the Universe, Creation,” I said softly, aware of the profound simplicity of nature's offerings.

Ama smiled and continued her work, her movements graceful and deliberate. “And in each of these plants, there is something the ancients knew long before we ever thought to write it down. Knowledge not passed through books, but through time and practice, woven into the very fibres of the earth.”

As I spoke with Ama, I was reminded of the story Ottavio once shared with me about her birth. It had always struck me as a tale woven with both tragedy and grace. Ama’s mother had been an African princess, brought to Macao as a slave. Ottavio had fallen deeply in love with her, and though she was a captive at the time, he bought her freedom. They lived together in Asia for seven years, without children, and on their journey, Ama’s mother had stayed pregnant. She passed away just moments after Ama was born.

Ottavio had often said that he believed she had sacrificed her life for the birth of a special soul, a soul that would bridge worlds. Ottavio would recall, his voice thick with emotion, that before the ship first touched the shores of Macao, he had had a vivid dream. In it, an angel wounded him with a spear,

and his blood mixed with the earth as the ground opened beneath him. From that darkness, a flower had blossomed — an incredible, radiant flower. The voice in the dream had whispered, 'Life for Life without boundaries.'

His wife had interpreted this dream as a prophecy, a prophecy of the birth of a child who would become an extraordinary spiritual being.

I couldn't help but glance at Ama, who was now gently placing the herbs into her basket. There was something about her that made the tale feel so real. She was no ordinary person. Her presence seemed to carry an energy that reminded me of that flower from Ottavio's dream — something radiant, something born of both darkness and light.

"Do you believe in prophecy, Benedict?" Ama asked, looking up from her basket with a twinkle in her eye, almost as if she had read my thoughts.

"I believe in the power of stories," I replied, pausing for a moment, "and I believe in the power of truth, even when it comes to us through dreams and symbols."

She nodded, her gaze thoughtful. "Perhaps the truth is not always found in what we see, but in what we feel." Her words resonated with me deeply, like the subtle whisper of the wind through the leaves.

But my musings were interrupted by a change in topic, a thought that had been preoccupying my mind. What I feared more than anything were the lunatics in power — the ones who could not see beyond their narrow understanding of the world, whose decisions were based on fear and dogma. I thought of the many times throughout history when knowledge was destroyed in the name of righteousness. The burning of books, the destruction of ancient wisdom, the erasure of knowledge that did not conform to a prescribed narrative.

"I know too well how quickly those in power can turn against knowledge," I said, almost to myself, as the thoughts swirled in my mind. "Take, for example, Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria in 367 AC. He ordered the destruction of all writings except those he deemed 'acceptable' — the ones that would later form the New Testament. When books are burned in this way, whole worlds of thought are obliterated."

Ama stopped for a moment, her eyes narrowing as she listened. "It's not just the burning of books, is it? It's the burning of the minds that created them. The voices silenced before their time."

I nodded. "Yes. We've seen it in the Library of Alexandria, in the destruction of Aztec codices by Itzcoatl, and the Maya manuscripts burned by Bishop Diego de Landa in the 16th century. The consequences are always profound, and often irreversible."

I paused, feeling the weight of those words, the destruction of knowledge that could have shaped the world in a different way. "Even the Vatican holds lists of forbidden books—works by Dante Alighieri, Giordano Bruno, Nicolaus Copernicus — all banned at one time. These were not just books, Ama. They were ideas. Ideas that challenged the very way people understood the world."

Ama's eyes glinted with understanding. "But ideas can't be destroyed, Benedict. They may be hidden, buried, forgotten, but they will always find a way back into the light."

Her words were a balm to my worries, and I let them settle within me. I knew she was right. Knowledge, once seeded, could never be completely eradicated. It always found a way to grow again.

I took a deep breath and pulled the letter from my pouch, sharing the good news. "I have good news," I said, looking up at Ottavio, who had joined us. "The great supporter of Christianity, Paul Siu, has resumed high office and is now in charge of the Chinese calendar reform."

Ottavio's eyes lit up, and he grinned. "This is the perfect opportunity, Benedict. Now, we can offer the Chinese the secrets of Arabic and European science in exchange for protection and the right to preach Christianity in China."

I felt a surge of hope. Perhaps this was the moment we had been waiting for, the moment when we could finally offer both knowledge and faith, when the East and West could come together, not in conflict, but in shared understanding. A new era could be born — one where science and spirituality could walk side by side.

"We are on the edge of something monumental," I said softly. "We must be ready to seize it."

"There is more to it," I replied. "Johann Adam Schall von Bell, a great friend of mine and the head of our mission, has been asked to replace his predecessor, Schreck, who was gravely ill, in the work of reforming the Chinese calendar. This task is far removed from his ordinary duties of the apostolate, but he is an honest man, and he understands that its success will determine the future of the mission."

Father Johann Adam was a highly educated man, born into a noble family in Cologne. His voice, looks, and movements mirrored his background, a love for studies, and a devotion to Jesus. He was a young Jesuit when he first arrived in Macau in 1619, when we were still deeply troubled by the war waged against us four years earlier by the high mandarin Kio Shin. Four of our chief missionaries could no longer continue their mission and were expelled to Macau. His first ten years within the mission were troublesome and bore little fruit. Now, in 1630, he had many years of experience, both in the successes and failures of converting Chinese to Christianity. He spoke Chinese perfectly and clearly understood that

for us to succeed, our approach had to radically change.

When he was asked to replace his predecessor, Schreck, he immediately understood that its success would determine the future of the Christian mission.

"As you know, I spoke to Johann Adam, suggesting that we base astrology on the calculation of the movements of planets along the ecliptic," I said.

In Chinese astrology, the lunar zodiac holds prime importance, with the sky divided into 28 segments that mark the Moon's journey through the sky.

The establishment of the Chinese Annual Calendar is one of the most important matters for the Chinese State. The Board of Mathematicians, comprising 200 highly educated members, gathers every year to announce the astronomical situation for the coming year. Their task is to build a calendar for the year to come, taking into consideration the days of the new and full moon, the times of the solstices and equinoxes, the positions and conjunctions of planets, and the movements of the sun, with the dates of its entrance into each of the twenty-eight constellations that form the Chinese zodiac.

"This calendar is of immense value to the natives," Ama emphasised, reinforcing my point. "It's not just about keeping track of time. It's how they make decisions."

"Yes, I've seen how deeply they value it," I added. "It's more than a tool — it's the foundation of their lives."

Ottavio, who had been listening intently, nodded. "Very true. Imagine, every action taken by a person in China, from a wedding to planting crops, is influenced by what the calendar tells them. It's a guide for everything."

I paused, thinking back to the previous day. "Just yesterday, at Li Po's house, I met one of his friends, a fortune teller and astrologer. He was constructing a personal horoscope for a wealthy merchant's son. It was fascinating. He showed me a rectangular grid he was working on, divided into twelve smaller rectangles, each one representing a month.

Using both the horoscope and the yearly calendar, he identified auspicious and inauspicious days for the merchant's son — days for his education, marriage, business ventures, and other family matters. He calculated when action should be taken and when rest was needed, which gods should be worshipped on certain days, and when trouble or luck was likely to strike. The calendar, he said, is the guide for every single day of the year!"

Ottavio raised an eyebrow, impressed. "Incredible. It's like their entire world revolves around these calculations."

"Yes," I agreed, "and the astrologers take their work very seriously. They hold the accuracy of the calendar in the highest regard. To get it wrong is unthinkable. It would upset the balance of the cosmos."

Ama smiled knowingly. "And you see, it is not just the astrologers and fortune tellers. Everyone uses the calendar — rulers, common folk, everyone. It guides their actions, their relationships with each other, and with the divine."

"The Chinese astrologers, whether educated or not, believe they can map the circle of life and death, charting each person or event according to the stars," I continued. "It's an entirely different worldview, yet one that is deeply entrenched in their society. The calendar is their link to the cosmos."

Ottavio nodded, his face serious. "They have a very unique perspective. And they believe that every movement in the sky affects life on Earth. The stars don't just predict — they govern."

"The heavens are divided into guardians of the four directional palaces," I explained, looking down at the text I had been reading earlier. "The Green Dragon of Spring, the Vermilion Bird of Summer, the White Tiger of Autumn, and the Black Tortoise of Winter. There's a fifth palace — the Central Palace — and that's where the Great Bear is located. It's like they see the entire universe as a kind of celestial map, and each part has its meaning."

Ama glanced at me thoughtfully. "I've heard about those palaces. But you're right, I had never thought of it that way. It's a world where everything, even the stars, plays a part in shaping destiny."

I opened the book of Huai Nan Tzu and began reading aloud. "Here's a chapter that gives advice to emperors on how to rule their kingdoms, based on celestial behaviour. It says, 'Men's lives are reflected in the movement of Heaven; when there is cruelty and violence, violent winds will follow. When there are oppressive laws, plagues of insects will come. The Four Seasons are the Annals of Heaven; the Sun and Moon are the Messengers of Heaven; the Stars and Planets record Heaven's seasons; Rainbows and comets are Heaven's warnings.'"

Ottavio's expression turned serious as he listened. "It's remarkable. Everything they do is influenced by the skies — every action, every change in the heavens. It's all connected."

I continued reading, "The book goes on to say, 'In the time of Chia Tzu, action should be restrained; in the time of Ping Tzu, the worthy should be promoted; in the time of Wu Tzu, the old and widows should be cared for, favours bestowed, and goods sold; in the time of Keng Tzu, walls and barriers should be reinforced, and fortifications strengthened.'"

Ama nodded thoughtfully. "Each period, each time, has its own characteristics, its own instructions for

rulers. It's as if the calendar isn't just a tool for prediction — it's a guide for how to live."

I closed the book slowly, letting the weight of the words sink in. "The idea that the heavens are tied to human affairs is so ingrained here. When they say the stars are the messengers of Heaven, it's not just a metaphor. Every celestial event is seen as an omen, a sign of something to come."

Ama tilted her head, her gaze distant. "Like the eclipses. They're not just a celestial event—they carry meaning. If the sun is eclipsed, it's a bad omen for the ruler. But if it's the moon, it affects the generals and advisors. It's all connected."

"We watch the sky all the time," my Chinese friend, who had been quietly listening, said with reverence. "Any changes in the appearance of the stars are carefully noted. Changes in colour, position, or brightness—they mean something specific. A minister may rise in favour, a war might break out, a prominent person could be punished for wrongdoing. Even the earth itself responds—crops ripen or fail, rain comes or drought follows. Everything is connected to the sky."

Johann Adam, who had been absorbing everything with keen interest, now spoke up. "It's fascinating. Their entire understanding of time, fate, and even politics is guided by these movements. If we are to integrate our knowledge of astronomy with theirs, we need to understand this cultural context fully."

"To understand Chinese astrology," I said, turning to Johann Adam, "we must understand their symbols, their elements, and their interactions. It's a different kind of logic, but it works within their worldview. We can't just look at the stars and their positions. We have to understand what those stars mean to the people here."

Ama nodded. "The accuracy of the calendar is crucial. An eclipse of the sun is a bad omen for the ruler, but an eclipse of the moon? That's a sign for the generals and advisors. If they get the timing wrong, it could mean disaster. They believe no mistake can be made in these calculations—everything must be precise."

"Which is why," I added, "the calendar isn't just a tool. It's a cornerstone of governance. A bad prediction could bring down an emperor."

Ottavio laughed softly. "Sounds like we need to get everything exactly right. Every calculation must be perfect."

"And that's where we come in," Johann Adam said, a hint of excitement in his voice. "With our knowledge, we can offer them a way to improve their calculations. We can be the bridge between their ancient methods and the new science we bring."

"Exactly," I replied, my thoughts already turning to the next steps in our mission. "If we succeed, we

could change the way they view the heavens—and our place in this country."

Ottavio mused, tapping his fingers on the table as he spoke. "Since the Chinese year is lunar, the New Moon always falls on the first day of the month, and it's shorter than the Western year by about ten days. This causes the year to 'drift'."

I nodded, considering the implications of this. "Yes, that's right. Over time, this drift leads to inaccuracies. If we show them that our calculations are superior, the Chinese will come to us for help. We'll be in a better position to share our knowledge."

Ottavio smiled. "Exactly. It's a small crack in their system, but a powerful one. If we present it correctly, they'll have to listen. The Chinese, as meticulous as they are in so many things, will recognize the flaws in their calculations once they see our more accurate methods."

Johann Adam, who had been silent until now, looked up from the papers he was sorting through. "This mission was well understood by our founder, Father Ricci," he said thoughtfully. "He saw the potential early on, inspiring some of the Chinese philosophers and scientists to start considering the translation of the Catholic liturgical calendar into Chinese. His vision wasn't just about conversion — it was about the exchange of knowledge."

I leaned forward, intrigued. "So, it's not just the calendar, then? We're working on much more than that?"

Johann Adam smiled, his eyes reflecting the weight of the conversation. "Much more. This is about building bridges, not just between two cultures, but between two ways of understanding the world. "Johann Adam nodded. "Indeed. What we need to do now is convince the authorities of the errors in their calendar and make them understand that they need us and our superior calculations. But it's about more than just proving them wrong. We need to show them that our way benefits them. That's the trick."

I frowned slightly. "But how do we prove that they need us without offending them? They've been using their calendar for centuries. It's a delicate matter."

"That's where the real challenge lies," Johann Adam said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "To approach them not as rivals, but as partners. We must emphasize how their system could be enhanced, not how ours is superior. If we position ourselves as guides rather than critics, we may have a chance."

I turned to Benedict, who had been quietly listening. "So, how do we do that?"

Johann Adam looked at me seriously. "To achieve this, Benedict, we must design a comprehensive course in astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, and other areas of mathematics. This will be your task.

I'll leave it in your capable hands. You've always had a knack for breaking down complex ideas into simpler terms."

I hesitated for a moment. "A course? For the Chinese? You want me to teach them everything from scratch?"

"Yes," Johann Adam said firmly, "but remember, it's not just about teaching them our system. It's about learning from them too, and integrating what we know with what they already understand. We'll need to approach it as a mutual exchange."

"I understand," I replied, the weight of the task settling in. "I'll get started on it. It's not going to be easy, but it's the only way forward."

Days passed as I worked tirelessly on the translations, the courses, and integrating both systems of knowledge. It was slow, meticulous work, but the potential was clear. Then, something unexpected happened — the Board of Mathematics made a crucial error in their eclipse calculation. We had warned them this would happen, and when the event occurred exactly as we had predicted, the Chinese were taken by surprise.

One morning, Johann Adam walked into the study with a grin on his face. "They've come to us for help," he said, his voice filled with excitement. "They're asking us to assist them in refining their

calculations. They want us to show them the proper method."

"Do they now?" I raised an eyebrow, skeptical but intrigued. "How did that happen?"

"Simple," Johann Adam replied, his eyes twinkling. "They realized that we were right. Our prediction was spot on. And now, they need our help to fix their calendar. The seed has been planted."

Ottavio chuckled. "It's always the little things that make the big impact. One mistake, and now they're asking for our guidance. This could be the opening we've been waiting for."

"Yes," I said thoughtfully, "this could be it. They're open to learning. If we handle this carefully, it could set the stage for much more. It's not just about fixing a calendar; it's about building trust."

Johann Adam leaned forward. "We need to act quickly. This is the moment. If we provide them with the knowledge they need, it could cement our position here for years to come."

However, not everyone shared the same mission.

Rumours circulated that the ships of the English East India Company sailed up the Pearl River, and after being refused trading privileges, they resorted to pillaging and burning many vessels and villages, spreading destruction wherever they went. The

Chinese even claimed there were incidents where armed parties of Portuguese soldiers entered villages and carried off women. In retaliation, they began destroying Portuguese ships, killing hundreds of their crew.

"It is difficult to see Christians as anything but savages who cannot tolerate other cultures, gods, and ways of thinking," Ottavio started one of his arguments about the behaviour of Christians as guests in foreign lands.

"Europeans are acting overwhelmingly rudely. The companies act with violence and brutal strength, with no moral values, and are motivated only by money," Ottavio was growing angry as he spoke.

"It is our task to show the Chinese the other, spiritual and scientific side of our culture, the side that cherishes philosophy and self-knowledge," I told him.

The prevailing thought among educated Chinese is that missionaries are difficult to communicate with and very dogmatic. They push the belief that there is no truth but Christian truth, and this will always keep them apart from the learned classes of China, who know better than to follow a dogmatic view.

In the midst of this turmoil, we were trying to build a new foundation that was meant to mark the beginning of a new century of knowledge exchange between the enlightened minds of China and Europe.

Our method and prediction soon proved to be true: working on the Calendar was the way to gain the Chinese's trust.

By 1634, we had helped translate and print around a hundred books containing the arts of European sciences: astronomy, arithmetic, geometry, mathematics, and astrology. Thirsty for knowledge from afar, the Chinese, for a moment, forgot the hardship brought by Europeans and began to open their long-locked doors, accepting our thoughts and beliefs.

All the provinces of China were soon informed of the important task entrusted to the missionaries. The news was received with interest, and we were now looked at with curiosity and accepted into many Chinese homes where previously we had no access.

Now, as we worked with the intellectual elite of China on a common goal — the reform of the Calendar — our reputation strengthened, and the Chinese felt honoured to be in our presence.

"Wherever we go, we are greeted with respect, listened to, and publicly congratulated. Gospel preaching is allowed in all provinces, and the first public church has opened in the capital. In just a few years of our work, the Emperor, whom I met personally, issued an imperial declaration praising our efforts. We even managed to convert ten eunuchs within the Imperial Palace," laughed Father

Schall. "This class was the first to oppose any of our preaching. It was a remarkable turn of events."

He paused, his eyes gleaming with pride. "Imagine the resistance we faced when we first arrived — how the very idea of foreign missionaries was met with disdain. But look at us now. The seeds of our labour have borne fruit in ways even I hadn't dared to dream."

"I remember," I said, leaning back in my chair, "the way they looked at us, as though we were ghosts. I thought they'd never listen to the Gospel. How could they, after centuries of their own beliefs?"

Father Schall smiled, nodding knowingly. "It was no easy task. But we had something they couldn't ignore—truth, knowledge, and a better way of seeing the world. And the Emperor, he was unlike any ruler I've met. So curious, so eager to learn from us."

This happy progress, however, was soon to be temporarily halted. The invasion of the Tatars and the revolution that overthrew the Ming dynasty brought the Manchu dynasty into power.

Father Schall's expression grew sombre as he remembered the turbulent time. "At Peking, I assisted the last of the Ming in his resistance, but it was clear—it was time for me to leave my kingdom. But we were fortunate—the Tatars, or rather, the Manchu rulers, regarded us favourably. Their new

Emperor, Shunzhi, was only a child when he ascended the throne in 1643."

I could see the glint of humour in his eyes, despite the gravity of the past. "The young Emperor had an insatiable curiosity. He would call for me constantly to hear stories from foreign lands, and he even visited my chambers once. A most unexpected knock on the door, you see."

"Did he ask for scientific advice?" I grinned, remembering the way the Emperor had often inquired about the stars and the universe.

Father Schall chuckled. "Not just advice — he wanted to discuss the nature of life, the universe, and the purpose of it all. Imagine an eight-year-old inquiring so deeply into such profound matters. It was a great privilege to be able to answer him."

He paused, reflecting on the monumental shifts that followed. "Not long after that, the Emperor made the new mathematical rules introduced by the missionaries compulsory for all the official Chinese astronomers. The Calendar reforms we'd worked so hard to establish became law."

I marvelled at the achievement. "And to think that such a young emperor could embrace such change."

"Indeed," Father Schall agreed. "It was a historic moment. The culmination of our efforts—my appointment as President of the Board of

Mathematicians. Our victory felt real, not just a distant hope."

Father Schall continued, his tone now softer, more reflective. "We had uprooted the negative seeds planted by the previous century. Those deep-rooted beliefs of separation and fear... they were being replaced by understanding, respect, and shared knowledge. I look back and I can finally see hope for the future."

I nodded. "And to top it all off, the Emperor bestowed upon you such an honour — your appointment as President, a high rank as a mandarin, something unheard of for a priest. It's a powerful statement of acceptance and trust."

Father Schall's face grew slightly uneasy. "Yes, the title... It's both a blessing and a burden. You know, I tried for over twenty years to decline it. Eight times I refused. I even pleaded before the Tribunal of Rites, on my knees, asking to be released from it. But they wouldn't hear of it."

"Why didn't they understand?" I asked. "Why insist on forcing this honour upon you when you were clearly in conflict with your vows?"

He sighed deeply, the weight of his years of service evident in his voice. "It was all about maintaining the goodwill of the governors, the stability of our mission. If I refused, it would have jeopardized everything we had worked for. And so, I was

compelled to accept, despite the violation of canon law. It was a choice between faithfulness to the mission and faithfulness to the Church's teachings."

"In the end, you did what was necessary," I said, placing a reassuring hand on his arm.

Father Schall smiled faintly, his eyes darkening as he recalled the gift the Emperor had given him in 1653. "As thanks for the work we had done in reforming the Calendar, Shunzhi bestowed upon me the title of Tung hiuen kiao shi, 'Most Profound Doctor.'"

John Adam had entered the room, holding a marble tablet intricately carved in Tatar and Chinese. He presented it to me, and I marvelled at the beauty of the craftsmanship. "This," he said, "represents the acknowledgment of our mission's success, the recognition of the scientific contributions we've made here."

"To think that it's now part of the imperial legacy," Father Schall added, his voice a mixture of pride and humility. "A public church, a new house for me, and even a donation for the church's construction — all signs of the Emperor's favour. And yet..."

"But not everyone was ready for such change," I said, picking up on his hesitation.

Father Schall looked weary. "No. Even as we saw progress, the question that had always lingered

remained. How could a Christian priest be President of the Board of Mathematicians? The board publishes a yearly calendar that includes superstitions, beliefs, and practices at odds with Christianity."

"And how could you sign documents that promote ancestor worship, rituals, and customs that contradict everything the Church stands for?" I added, my voice quiet with the weight of his dilemma.

Father Schall's face darkened. "It was a difficult position. How could I, a Catholic Jesuit priest, head a board that governs practices so clearly contrary to Christian scripture? The very idea sent ripples through the missionary community."

I could sense his inner struggle, the conflict between duty to the Church and the responsibility he felt to the people who had come to depend on him. "What did the other priests say? What were their thoughts on your new role?"

Father Schall shook his head. "In Macau, the gossip began almost immediately. Ethical debates raged on for years. Some believed I had betrayed my vows. Others thought I had found a way to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable. But the question remained—how could a man of faith lead a group so entwined with pagan customs?"

We both fell into a long silence, the gravity of the situation hanging in the air between us. Finally, I

spoke, my voice steady. "It's hard, isn't it? To be caught between two worlds, two duties."

"Yes," Father Schall replied, his gaze distant. "But sometimes, in the pursuit of a higher calling, we must make choices that challenge our very foundations. And hope that in the end, the greater good will be served."

"I'll tell you a story," Ama once said. "There was a very gifted musician, a flautist, who lived next to the forest. His music was so beautiful that everyone, from men to animals and even spirits, would stop to listen. He had a gift, bringing beauty and spirit through his playing. One day, while he was playing in the woods, wolves, foxes, and birds peacefully gathered around to admire his music. Suddenly, a massive dark tiger leaped out of the forest. It startled everyone, attacked the flautist, and devoured him in an instant, before anyone could utter a word. The gathered crowd was stunned and heartbroken. 'How could you do that? Didn't you hear how beautiful and heavenly his music was?' they asked in unison.

'Music? Play? Heaven? What are you talking about?' replied the half-deaf tiger. 'You cannot play music to the deaf, no matter how beautiful it is. The deaf will not hear you.'"

I grew wary of the deaf.

The audience that reminds me of the deaf tiger is the one that is rough, certain that there is no subject they do not understand better than anyone else, closed off to learning. They are always ready to confront you. They are not open to listening or growing. They are not ready to receive. They believe they own their lives that they can act differently, but are driven by attachments and instincts. Within the infinite possibilities for a soul to evolve, they always choose the same path—the path of suffering.

Fra Thomas was one of these tigers.

I always knew when I would encounter Fra Thomas. There was a sense of mischievous mystery, discomfort, and foreboding that accompanied his presence. I could feel it long before he appeared. My stomach would churn uneasily. Whenever he schemed, Fra Thomas became one of my weaknesses.

It was hard to stay calm after any of his visits, which were always steeped in prejudice, fear, and failure. That day, he appeared as though surrounded by a dark cloud. His voice was cold, and his mind seemed entangled in all his recent experiences, wrapped in a thick veil of darkness.

Once engulfed in that black velvet of despair, the darkness became all-consuming. Living in a reality he called the "reality of the Church," he seemed trapped in a mental prison, unwilling to awaken or perceive anything beyond his suffering. His hatred

for Ama was all-consuming, and it defined his very life.

"She is a witch, I'm certain of it," he declared vehemently. "I will stop her black magic. And her father is a witch, too! All that wealth—where do you think it comes from? It's the Devil who aids them!"

"You remember Ruben — he was like a son to me," Fra Thomas continued. "He's under her spell now, and who knows how many others are too? I've come to warn you as a friend, before you fall under her influence!"

"I know of their wicked deeds — devouring children, spreading sickness, and death," he added, shaking his head as though trying to shake off the thought.

I paused time.

I waited, as if the universe itself needed to stop. I paused, waiting for the Earth to realign, for the energies of the world to find balance. I looked up into God's eyes, but saw nothing. God refused to look at me. The time had not yet come. We had planted the seeds for future generations to reap, but it was not our moment.

Humanity was not yet ready to listen.

Fra Thomas, the Church, and all of humanity were too deeply immersed in anger to see anything else. His face, his words, the "holy" wars, the killings in

the name of the Lord, the tortures, the persecutions, the Inquisition — all of it stood before me, shaping the future in a cycle of Fear and Confusion.

He pulled a small, hidden book from his coat pocket — his Witch-Hunter's manual — and began reading aloud:

"Do you know what's happening on the mainland? They are everywhere! They fly and meet the Devil every night! Now is the time for us to act and root out this supreme wickedness!"

He continued reading, hoping to influence me, to break whatever spell he thought I was under:

"It has come to our ears, not without great pain, that many men and women, heedless of their own salvation, give themselves over to devils, both male and female. Through their incantations, charms, and conjuring, they ruin and cause to perish the offspring of women…"

"…they afflict and torture with dire pain, both internal and external, men, women, cattle, flocks, herds, and animals. They prevent men from begetting, women from conceiving, and obstruct all consummation of marriage…"

"She is not married, you know," he added. "And yet, she managed to lure Ruben into her sinful net. I saw them together."

We locked eyes, words hanging in the air between us like sharpened swords. Fra Thomas wore his shield of intolerance — rooted deeply in human beliefs, fairy tales, myths, and sacred texts. He carried the weight of separation.

Any reasoning I offered, about witchcraft myths or the love Ama showed for those she cared about, shattered upon impact, scattering like wounded birds. The more I spoke, the more he believed I was the witch, dancing sinful dances beneath the Full Moon, using the bones of the dead as instruments of music.

The era we lived in wasn't ready to accept our mission, to merge many into one. Humanity was too obsessed with separation. Our dream of creating a critical mass capable of shifting the world's consciousness, transforming its behavior, seemed to dissolve into the cracks of stone, hidden behind thick, evergreen branches, merging with the moon's reflection on the river. It hid before Fra Thomas, who radiated dogma and revulsion from every pore.

We succeeded in translating and distributing books, opening Chinese minds to Christian thought. But we couldn't reverse the rigidity of our homeland's thinking. It remained stubborn and immovable.

Though we had earned the respect of the Chinese during our mission, it wasn't enough.

Fra Thomas aimed a carefully prepared, poisonous arrow straight into my heart. According to him, the Church saw all our work as a failure. The Church now officially disapproved of our mission.

"The Chinese continue to follow their primitive rituals and customs," he ranted. "They combine their ancient worship with Christianity, and this is unacceptable. It's a disgrace, heresy!"

"Belief in spirits and guides is primitive," he repeated. "Predictions are pagan, and the Church cannot coexist with paganism!"

"We must fight against the old ways for our mission to succeed! It's not a Christian victory if we co-exist with old customs."

Fra Thomas was merely parroting the message we all feared — the message of the Church, unwilling to grow, unwilling to accept.

At that time, deeply immersed in our mission, it hurt me to realize that even here, so far from Rome, we could not escape the grip of the old ways.

Men's minds were not ready to hear.

"To the non-Christians," Fra Thomas cried, "we have nothing to say but that they were given the chance to repent and come to God—but they chose not to."

In 1655, five theologians from the Roman College examined Fra Thomas's accusations, and Father Schall was asked to resign as President of the Board of Mathematicians.

That same month, Fra Thomas arrested Ama for witchcraft.

The wheel of fortune turned against us.

Its deadly cracks loomed above our heads, threatening to crush us. All our years of effort seemed in vain. The galaxies of human minds trembled. We had the support of hundreds of souls born to help the shift, Lady Science had blessed us with so many insights—but the old structure was not ready to fall.

History now reads as follows: the conflict between the Chinese government and Catholicism, which began in 1616, continued for over thirty years, reaching its peak once more.

High-ranking officials advised the Emperor that Catholicism was disrespecting Chinese customs and should be banned. By disrespecting Chinese culture, we had sent the message of war.

In 1662, our protector, Emperor Shunzhi, passed away. In 1664, the Chinese arrested Father Schall and me. Though no evidence of conspiracy was found, we were imprisoned for high treason and the propagation of an evil religion. Around thirty

missionaries were arrested and brought to the capital for questioning. A few were allowed to remain outside the city, while others were deported or imprisoned. Churches were closed, and scriptures were burned.

In 1720, fifty years after our deaths, tensions between China and Catholicism persisted. Emperor Yongzheng passed a law expelling all missionaries from China. Most were forced to flee to Macao. Many churches were repurposed as town halls or schools, and some were torn down. Followers were forbidden from becoming Catholics again.

Our age called for martyrs — those who would die for reform, sacrificing themselves for future generations.

Though the success of the Calendar conversion was short-lived, its effects reached deep into both civilizations. Throughout the struggle, I reached great heights but also fell to the deepest depths in the darkness of a jail cell.

After a brief trial, where it was clear we were guilty, we were condemned to be torn apart and beheaded.

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect... If an organization be created for this purpose, it becomes a crutch, a weakness, a bondage, and must cripple the individual, and prevent him from growing, from establishing his uniqueness, which lies in his discovery for himself of that absolute, unconditioned Truth... You can form other organizations and expect someone else. With that I am not concerned, nor with creating new cages, new decorations for those cages. My only concern is to set men absolutely, unconditionally free.

Krishnamurti

"What was your job in Macao, Ama Denobille?"

Her nerves were steady enough, he noted, observing her hands bound behind her back. That peaceful demeanour suggested a heart unshaken.

A few kilometres away, he murmured, "You're no fool, and I'll back you up."

"First, I need you to write a letter to the Governor — your uncle. I've got to get in touch with the Bishop as soon as possible." He tugged at his beard.

"That won't help you." He sighed, then added, "I'll go one better. I'll explain the matter to the Pope himself."

He sat down and dictated a letter. The essence of it was clear: if a priest named Benedict appeared, he was to be treated as a brother. He would prove his legitimacy by carrying a ring shaped like a Maltese cross.

"What's next?" he asked, looking up.

As evening descended and the mists cleared after sunset, Ama found herself in a wide, open world, the far-off azure horizon merging seamlessly with the sea.

"It wasn't easy, keeping my sanity in that place," she whispered.

He gently caressed her hand before swiftly lifting her from the boat, finding solace in their quiet sanctuary. After a brief silence, he took her into a meditation that both puzzled and terrified him. Their shared glance spoke volumes; two old friends laughed softly.

"Are we safe?"

"We are safe!" Father Benedict nodded confidently. "I convinced them that the Inquisition need not pursue us. This is a lucky morning for you, Ama — and for all of us."

He instinctively clapped his hands, but Ama anticipated it. She leaped up and gave him a long, well-deserved hug. The tension that had gripped them all began to dissipate.

"It's alright," he reassured. "We're safe! We had to get you out of that rat hole before Fra Thomas stayed another minute."

24 Hours Earlier:

For years, I — Fra Thomas, if you wonder — had avoided meeting Ama. I believed she possessed the allure of a nymph, capable of ensnaring victims with her beauty and stripping them of their free will.

"Magic spells, witchcraft — both she and her father!" I scolded Ruben and other Christians for associating with her.

Ama and Ottavio de Nobille's lives were private, almost to the point of secrecy. Ottavio was wealthy and had powerful friends, including some of Europe and China's most influential men. On several occasions, I tried to instigate an inquiry against him, but my efforts were fruitless.

Knowing Ama was black and a daughter of a slave, I bided my time, waiting for Ottavio's death to act. In the meantime, I closely monitored their connections—prominent missionaries, scientists, government officials, including Ruben, Benedict, and Father Schall.

Ruben had been like a son to me before the Dutch attack. He was a devoted Christian, and his conversion efforts were exemplary. I admired his unwavering faith, but after the attack on Macao, his focus began to shift. The number of converts dwindled, and his devotion to Christianity waned, replaced by an increasing desire to retreat to the monastery and pray.

Years passed, and despite my efforts, Ruben's relationship with Ama only deepened. I demanded that he either leave the Church or cease seeing her. To my shock, he chose neither. Instead, he left both of us.

The loss of this special soul burned within me.

Once, I had the chance to confront Ama directly. I was determined to arrest her and prove her connection to the Devil. Her room, circular in shape, was decorated with astrology symbols, and at its centre was an altar.

I had been invited under the guise of research into alchemy, using Father Benedict's recommendation. As I scanned the room for proof of her heresy, Ama spoke.

"As you know," she began, "Alchemy and Magic are the feminine aspects of Christianity. They represent the hidden, underground methods — the Yin to the religion's Yang."

I circled the room, searching for any forbidden texts. Her voice continued, "While you, in preaching Christianity, focus on morals, Alchemy works with the unexplored aspects of consciousness — the shadow."

The mention of "shadow" caught my attention. She smiled as if she knew exactly what she had done.

"Developing the feminine principles," she continued, her voice rich with conviction, "awakens the rational, masculine side — the religion. Christianity and Alchemy are complementary, they seek the same goal."

“Through Christ or through the Devil,” I interrupted.

Her eyes sparkled, but she remained calm. “The goal is the same for both — getting closer to God.”

She spoke of a union between opposites, between the masculine and feminine, between the light and the dark. "Dismissing magic and the unknown as Devil’s work only deepens the divide between good and evil. It creates rigid boundaries that stifle progress and evolution."

I could feel my resolve wavering. Her words were a puzzle, but I quickly shut down the creeping doubt.

“You can’t say that!” I shot back.

But she continued, unshaken. "Dismissing Alchemy, Astrology, Science, and Magic, the dogmatic wilfully turn their backs on change, on wisdom. They wither and die, creating knots of stagnation.”

For a moment, I felt a shift in myself. Could there be some truth in what she said? But no. My mission was clear. I had come to arrest her, and so I would.

She didn’t hate me. I could see it in her eyes. She saw me as part of God’s plan, a nuisance perhaps, but still part of creation.

I had convinced the Church officials that the Chinese calendar reform was a disgrace, and my efforts led

to Father Schall's resignation and the awakening of Chinese anger.

I imprisoned Ama for witchcraft, but her imprisonment lasted only days. I couldn't gather enough evidence to prove her guilt. Her influential Chinese friends quickly dismissed the charges as illegal, citing that Macao was not under Portuguese rule but Chinese jurisdiction. I was scolded for daring to detain her.

My death ended the futility of my mission, its purpose known only to God and Ama.

'He who joyfully marches to music rank and file, has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake, since for him the spinal cord would surely suffice. This disgrace to civilization should be done away with at once. Heroism at command, how violently I hate all this, how despicable and ignoble war is; I would rather be torn to shreds than be a part of so base an action. It is my conviction that killing under the cloak of war is nothing but an act of murder.'

Albert Einstein

A Man Trained to Kill

I first encountered Ama during the Dutch attack on Macao on June 24, 1622. After our defeat, she tended to my wounds, helping me recover physically. As a soldier of the Dutch East India Company, and I didn't trust Ama or her family. While waiting for the smoke to clear and my body to heal, my mind felt shackled, and I could do little to break free.

I had lunch at a humble tea house in Macao and then walked four kilometres along the winding road through rolling hills and verdant meadows, accompanied by the constant sounds of crickets, frogs, and rustling branches. The weight of my mission bore heavily on me, and I felt a sense of hopelessness. Eventually, I climbed a hillside and fell asleep, exhausted by the endless walk. When I awoke, I felt like a tired, worn figure — somewhere between a farm animal and a labourer — as I descended into a small town on the Chinese coast.

There were people on the road, but I thought it best to wait before asking for directions, hoping to familiarize myself with the neighbourhood. The path led through a graveyard, giving me time to reflect on my situation. The air, thick and heavy after the events in Macao, seemed to settle in the small fishing village, bringing me a sense of unexpected peace.

For a moment, I even wished to confront hunger, desiring a simple, physical fight, a release for my frustration. Yet, my restlessness persisted, and I felt a voice in my mind urging me to escape, or risk losing the chance to ever rest again. My thoughts were scattered, dry as desert sand, and nothing seemed to make sense.

Suddenly, I found myself swimming in the ocean, naked. As I dried myself, I looked into the depths, and a melody escaped my lips — "Het Wilhelmus." To my surprise, a Chinese fisherman emerged from the waterside, whistling the same tune. As a horse cart passed, the old man in it raised his whip in salute to the fisherman, and I watched them with a curious sense of detachment.

Huan, sitting nearby, explained, "The Dutch East India Company, our great leader, controls the Asian trade routes, establishing colonies and making treaties with Asian rulers. They are an unstoppable force." He spoke of the Company’s vast influence, the army it commanded, and the wars it waged in Asia. "Macao is a key port, and capturing it would strengthen the Company’s hold over the region."

As Huan and I ate together, a lizard or butterfly occasionally wandered across the road, their presence a reminder of the small wonders in life. We spoke little, lost in our meal, while a heron observed us in silence. Soon, the night became damp, and the nearby branches solidified, mirroring the fatigue that had settled into my body.

The Chinese man next to me grew thoughtful, and in the distance, I felt the tension of being observed from higher ground, as though someone was watching me. I didn't want to return to my house, repeating those words to myself as I lay still. The gentle voice of Father Benedict seemed to loosen the tension in my joints, and for a moment, I felt hypnotized by the calm.

"I have connections with the top brass at VOC," I began, breaking the silence as we sat by the fire. "I was once one of their most trusted soldiers, a spy. They sent me to discover the secrets of martial arts, which had been developed in China for centuries."

The fire crackled, the warmth from the flames illuminating the serious expression on my face. The Chinese man, Huan, listened intently, his eyes reflecting curiosity and the weight of my words. I leaned back, allowing the memories to surface, and continued.

"I was assigned to infiltrate the Shaolin Monastery, the heart of Chinese martial arts. I became part of their world, but not easily. The monks did not trust outsiders, especially not a foreigner, a Dutchman." I paused, collecting my thoughts. "But my mission was clear — learn their secrets, learn their ways."

I saw Huan's eyes narrow as I spoke, and I could tell he was beginning to grasp the magnitude of the task. "How did you get in?" he asked quietly.

"Patience," I answered. "And a letter of recommendation from a few influential Chinese officials. But that was only part of it. The monks wouldn't admit me easily. I had to show them I was worthy of their trust, so I lived in a cave by the monastery for months, training, meditating, and slowly gaining their respect."

Huan's interest seemed to grow with each passing word. "A cave? You spent months in a cave"

I nodded. "Yes. Just like the legend of Bodhidharma, the monk who brought martial arts to the monastery centuries ago. They wouldn't let him in either, so he meditated in a cave for nine years until they saw his commitment. I used the same approach—patience, persistence. I trained on my own, and in the meantime, I tended to the sick and helped a young monk who had fallen ill. That act earned me the favour of the elders."

Huan's eyes widened, a flicker of admiration in his gaze. "You saved one of their own? That's incredible."

"It wasn't easy," I replied, a small smile tugging at the corner of my mouth. "But it was enough. The elders saw it as an omen, and they allowed me entry into the Temple. From there, my real training began."

I paused, watching the fire's reflection in Huan's eyes. "The monks were cautious with me, though.

Before they would teach me their martial arts, I had to prove myself. It wasn't just about physical strength; it was about understanding discipline, humility, and the balance between body and mind."

Huan nodded thoughtfully. "So, what did you learn about their martial arts?"

I exhaled slowly, recalling the lessons that had transformed my understanding of combat. "The first thing I learned was Chi Gung. It's a form of 'energy work,' but it's not like anything I had ever encountered before. The movements are slow, almost meditative. They focus on precision, on drawing power from within. I had been trained for speed, power, and aggression, but Chi Gung was about control, stillness, and cultivating the flow of energy."

I looked at Huan, trying to convey the depth of the experience. "Chi, or Qi, is more than just a concept. It's the life force that flows through everything—through us, through the trees, the rivers, even the stars in the sky. To know Chi is to understand the very essence of life itself."

Huan leaned in slightly, his expression one of deep intrigue. "It sounds... almost spiritual."

"It is," I agreed, nodding. "It's not just about fighting; it's about understanding the interconnectedness of all things. The monks believe that mastering Chi leads to physical and spiritual

harmony, that it's the key to healing the body and mind. Once you understand how to control your own energy, you can influence the world around you."

Huan seemed lost in thought for a moment, before asking, "But did they teach you the fighting techniques as well? After all, that was why you were there."

"Yes," I replied, my voice becoming more reflective. "But it wasn't just about learning martial arts. It was about something deeper. The monks' discipline was unlike anything I had encountered in my life. It was a constant struggle for balance — between body and mind, between strength and humility. And when they finally accepted me fully into their ranks, I took an oath, not just to follow their teachings, but to live by them. 'Ming Sum Gim Sing,' they called it— understand your mind and see your true nature."

Huan remained silent for a moment, digesting what I had shared. Finally, he spoke. "It's hard to imagine you — trained to be a spy, a soldier — becoming a part of something like that."

I chuckled softly, a bitter edge to my laugh. "I never expected it either. When I left the VOC and joined the monastery, I realized how much I had been shaped by their teachings. I had become a perfect killing machine, but I was also something else— someone who had learned the value of patience, of understanding, and of balance."

I leaned back, the fire casting long shadows around us. “But in the end, that training served its purpose. After my mission was complete, I came to Macao — a place of both opportunity and darkness. I’ve seen first-hand how easily power can corrupt, and how fragile peace can be. That’s why I’m here, Huan. Not just to trade or profit, but to understand — to bring these teachings back to the West, and to bridge the gap between two worlds.”

Huan looked at me for a long moment, as if weighing my words. Finally, he spoke, his voice low. “I can see the weight of your journey in you. And I understand now why you’ve come so far. You didn’t just learn their martial arts — you learned their philosophy. The real battle is not against others, but against yourself.”

I nodded, feeling the truth of his words settle deep within me. “Exactly. And that’s the most difficult battle of all.”

We sat in silence for a time, the fire slowly dying down, as the sounds of the night — birds, insects, the distant rustle of leaves — filled the air. The path ahead seemed unclear, but in that moment, I knew one thing for certain: the lessons I had learned in China were only the beginning.

I shifted slightly, my mind drifting back to those days within the Temple, to the very core of what had transformed me. "Within the Temple, the monks developed a new, high-level martial art," I began,

my voice taking on a reflective tone. "It was the culmination of all their years of experience. They combined ancient wisdom with the most advanced knowledge of the human body, psychology, and fighting. It became the pinnacle of their discipline. They called it Wing Chun."

Huan leaned in, his expression focused. “Wing Chun? I’ve heard of it. But I thought it was just a style for fighting.”

I nodded, remembering the first time I had encountered the system. "It was more than just fighting. It was about survival, precision, and efficiency. Wing Chun was designed for one purpose: hand-to-hand combat. The monks’ goal was simple. In case of emergency, they wanted to train ordinary people — women, farmers, anyone to defend themselves quickly and effectively. Every movement had to be coordinated, precise, and powerful, no wasted energy. It was simple but deadly."

Huan raised an eyebrow. "Simple? From what you’ve told me, it sounds anything but."

"It is," I said, "but that's the genius of it. It’s stripped down to its essentials. No fancy kicks or unnecessary flourishes. Just raw power, directed with precision."

I leaned forward, eager to explain the depth of the art. “When I got to know it, I realized why Wing Chun was conducted and passed from monk to monk

in such secrecy. It wasn't just a fighting technique — it was the supreme art of killing."

Huan looked at me with a mix of awe and disbelief. "The supreme art of killing?"

I nodded solemnly. "Yes. My teacher, the one who initiated me into it, explained it like this: 'Wing Chun is like a divine dance,' he said. 'It is very precise, clear. You do not need all the high kicks and fancy moves you see in other martial arts. Its movements are refined, focused.'"

Huan's gaze intensified, and I could tell he was trying to picture it in his mind. "So, it's all about precision, about hitting the right points?"

"Exactly," I continued, remembering the day my teacher had demonstrated the art for me. "You learn the 'Five Lines' of human anatomy, the key lines that define the body's structure. The most important line is the 'One' line, which divides the body in half. It runs right through the centre, covering many vital points. If you strike this line — precisely — you can cause instant disability or even death."

I paused, letting the gravity of those words sink in before adding, "It's all about sensitivity. The flexibility and coordination of your arms and hands, your body. The idea is that while your opponent is focused on your hands, your feet have already broken their kneecaps. You use their own force against them, positioning your body and limbs in

such a way that it becomes an explosive reaction. The fight is over before they know it."

Huan's eyes widened as he absorbed the power behind these words. "That's... that's terrifying," he muttered.

I shook my head slowly. "Terrifying, yes. But effective. The fights don't last long. A few strikes, and it's done."

I looked at the fire, remembering how it felt to be trained in such a method, how it had transformed me into something more than I had ever wanted to become. "For someone like me — trained to kill since the age of thirteen — it was a perfect fit. My passion for fighting had once been used by the VOC military machine. I became famous for my talents. I knew how to hide, endure hardship, wait, and strike with deadly precision."

Huan's face softened with understanding. "But you didn't want to be that person anymore, did you?"

"No," I replied, my voice heavy with regret. "The more I was praised, celebrated for my 'bravery,' the more I hated myself. The humanity that had shaped me — made me into a weapon — felt distant, as though it wasn't mine at all."

I sighed, the memory of those years hanging like a dark cloud over me. "When I left the Temple, I realized something. I had become a supreme killing

machine. My training had been so thorough that if anyone threatened my space, my body would react automatically. Every movement I made — every punch, every kick — could be fatal."

The silence between us deepened, broken only by the crackling of the fire. Huan shifted slightly, trying to absorb the weight of what I had said. "But you didn't want to go back to Holland. You left the VOC behind, didn't you?"

"Yes," I said, my voice firm. "I was sent to Macao after completing my mission as a spy. I was left unconscious after the battle there, and that's when I met Ama."

"Ama?" Huan echoed, curiosity evident in his voice.

I smiled faintly, thinking of the young woman who had cared for me when I had nothing left. "She treated me as though I were family, even when I was nothing but a stranger, a prisoner. Her compassion... it changed something in me."

Huan raised an eyebrow. "You think she changed you?"

"Yes," I said quietly, "she treated me as a free man and a sin-free soul, something I had not felt in a long time. And it scared me, Huan. Because I had never seen myself that way."

The words hung in the air, heavy with the weight of their meaning. I had spent years locked in a battle with myself, trying to reconcile the person I had become with the person I wanted to be. And now, even as I stood at the crossroads of my past and future, I could feel the tug of something new pulling me forward.

Huan studied me for a long moment, as if seeing something deeper. "You don't have to be what you were, you know. The past doesn't define you. Only the present, the choices you make from here on out, can shape the man you will become."

I nodded slowly, the fire's glow flickering in the stillness of the night. "You're right. The real battle, after all, is the one within. And I'm just beginning to understand that."

"What drives people to war with themselves is the knowledge that both human and Cosmos exist as the duality of Tao, the yin and yang of existence, or life and death stream." A peacock entered the gardens. I called that a good omen.

"In an individualistic society, where personal wealth is the chief measure of achievement, a morality that gives us 'turn the other cheek' does not offer proper moral debate."

She glanced over me as though she didn't see me and continued: "The Ancient Greeks took a different view. For them, the whole of life is an ethical affair.

Education in literature, arts, music, and sports opens the possibility for us to live more knowledgeably." Ama saw me and stopped short, and before lunch began, she cleaned the tables. I opened the gate and rang the bell.

The young lady was far too absorbed in her own universal vibrations to think how odd it was to ask a stranger who had just escaped death to help in the dinner preparations.

Allow me to contemplate oddness while I ate, she continued to talk, giving me a gift of her full confidence.

"Can your mind be changed?" the lady of the house asked. All in this household was the result of immense thinking.

"Stick by the Dutchman's side until he is in his room again," she insisted, guiding a little Chinaman to stay with me during our journey back. I don't mind admitting that she made me horribly nervous. These were the beginnings of the new me.

"This belief is utopian, for of course there have been bad people. But it can be expected to do so far more than the ignorant or egoistic treatment…"

That month of July, I booed Ama's guests twice, and she was heavily criticised for failing to condemn my action. There were jeers as the Duke of Cambridge, president of a number of clubs, was introduced to

Ottavio's guests before the kick-off of an art event. A King's state statue was egged and used as a "public toilet" on the day of unveiling. After the expensive statue was put on its plinth in Macao, the unknown protester threw three eggs, of which only one hit the target. The local news called this scene "disrespectful."

A watchman had been placed opposite the statue, in hopes of finding the culprit. Within the same news, read aloud to all, the King was named: "Radiant, happy and simply glorious!" The King lifted the nation's spirits as he attended the first of his National Celebrations that month. The radiant monarch received a standing ovation from the crowd. All the King's pamphlets were regularly destroyed. During the first year of my stay in Ama's household, everyone was convinced that I was obsessed with the Devil.

When I first came to the De-Nobile's, I had bought a horse and amused myself with running about the neighbourhood. So I learned the geography of the place. Riding through the little towns with their sunrise-bathed streets, and past gardens in the valley. It became my routine for years. I met Reuben for Morning Prayer at his house in the Monastery's grounds punctually by half-past six, landed Sir Ottavio at his house for breakfast on Empire Chang Avenue punctually by eight, and was back working on my daily chores by nine.

This morning journey is too important for the ordinary man's life; it carries the imprint of each day.

"I will tell you a story of Krishna and his main follower Arjuna. Krishna, as an Indian god, was one day meant to keep guard deep within the dark forest. Arjuna, his main worshipper, got very upset and worried; he didn't want his Lord to get hurt. Hearing his worry, Krishna smiled and replied, 'Arjuna, I have never created demons nor evil spirits.'

This puzzled Arjuna. 'Then, how can the non-existent demons appear in the forest and attack the innocent?' he asked his Lord. 'The demon you are talking about is not a demon at all. It is just a reflection of the evil qualities within you, your hatred, your anger, and your jealousy. No demon has ever been created by me!'"

We emerged into the sunlight to find Ama sitting in a deep armchair in the garden she called her sanctuary, meeting us with curious eyes.

Looking at the paintings of Krishna, a blue-skinned young Hindu god playing his flute, a shepherd boy lost in the game of life and laughter, surrounded by many forest beings or Dakinis in love, I tried to connect with his lightness of Being. From that point onwards, I asked all to keep calling me Krishna.

"Krishna, how are your Devils?" Ama asked teasingly.

"They trouble me, all my little Devils (I was now amused calling them this way), with hatred, self-pity, attachments, desires, and I am yet to learn how to transform them into their opposites."

Waking up in the middle of the night, tortured with one of my previous 'kills', I was blessed with each moment of complete bliss and peace. This timelessness detached and fulfilled essence after a heavy day's work or a day spent in the woods with crickets and frogs would physically leave me fragile but alert.

"Can it be that by the act of physical isolation, I did open a channel to our ancestors' accumulated wisdom?" Wishing to impress Ama, words came easily.

"Your initiation had started at the Monastery," Ama replied, "now you'll experience the transformation."

"In the same way you were once trained to kill, now you need to train love." Ama affirmed.

To choose happiness as the way of life, I needed to train love.

My lesson was that the body temple needs nourishing, a proper balanced diet, rest, and action. Like with machines that have to be maintained every

day, I had to learn to be aware of my actions and chained reactions.

So, I spent years learning ‘remembering’.

In the middle of my meal, leaving hunger behind, leaving tension behind, leaving gluttony behind, I would try to find pleasure in the food.

Stopping in the middle of a conversation or heated argument, observing people talking, I would deliberately walk barefoot through the woods, or wear minimal clothing when it was cold, observing my eagerness or hate, asking myself: who is it that is angry, who is the one that is sad, who is the one that hates?

One day I started hearing my thoughts.

The thoughts most difficult to fight were the petite ones.

I struggled.

They would creep into my head like worms, slowly and almost unnoticed, but they would multiply fast and take all the space, becoming the centre of me and my life, causing sadness and anger.

In the same way, I was once trained to kill, now I have trained to love.

"Through the development of virtues, your mind gradually 'whitened'," Ama explained years later, "through the constant struggle with instincts, where 'I' breaks into many pieces, your 'I's changed. I saw you changing through all these years."

"Try with this thought," Ama said, "try with: I am not any better or any worse than anybody else."

Neither better nor worse! Experimenting with this thought was challenging. Prompted by Ama, I meditated on Christ, Buddha, and listened to great men speak. The realisation that "a little me is not any worse" was powerful, yet tough to accept.

"Teach me about Awareness," I asked my Dakini.

"Walking through life asleep requires less effort. It's easier to say, 'Only God knows why this has happened!' But once you are in the state of awareness, you are exactly where you are meant to be. Indeed, God does know why something has happened."

The Remembrance returned the pain.

Following my path of purification, after many years, I fell violently ill again, secretly hoping that Death would bring me closer to union with God, Love, Spirit, and Light. Ama recognised my secret thoughts.

"Purity alone is not enough," she said, nursing me. "In the process of transformation, after black becomes white, white must become yellow, and then red—the energy of fire. It must eventually become the Sun itself. It is your time to shine." She trusted in my strength.

Another time, she said: "After whitening, when the male and female principles within you merge, you will become a vessel of pure force. Crimson will be born, and that crimson will produce gold."

"There is a spiral movement in our spiritual development, and at times it may feel discouraging."

The Soul, now full of light, cries out: Awaken!

"Your Soul wants to go through the final stage of alchemical rebirth—through resurrection, becoming a Zhenren, an Authentic Man. You can become a Zhenren, gaining the power to stop the cycle of Life and Death. Your death is in your hands!"

Compassion for all living beings in the Universe.

Ama, with a gentle touch, healed me, treating me as though I were a lost sibling, offering no judgment or condemnation. From that moment on, she saw me not as a soldier but as a free man.

Ama spoke of the duality of existence — the yin and yang of life, and the balance between war and peace. She didn't judge me for my past, instead

encouraging me to explore my own transformation. "In an individualistic society, where personal wealth is everything, true moral debate lies in understanding life as an ethical affair," she said.

Over time, I began to question everything I had known.

I had come to understand the teachings of Krishna, the ancient Indian god of love and destruction, and I started to see the wisdom in his words. The more I explored, the more I became aware of the inner battles within myself. The desires, the hatred, the anger — everything that had once defined me — were now my "little devils," and I was learning how to transform them into their opposites.

Ama taught me that the true path to transformation wasn't just about controlling my anger or desires, but about learning to love. "Your mind must change," she would say. "Your inner battle must become one of love, not of hatred."

Years passed, and I spent my days training, meditating, and reflecting. Through the practice of awareness and self-discipline, I slowly learned to quiet the inner chaos. Eventually, I came to understand that my true mission was not just as a soldier or a spy, but as a man seeking to find inner peace.

Ama's guidance, her wisdom, helped me navigate this journey. "Purity is not enough," she said one

day, as I lay sick and contemplating death. "You must go beyond that. You must become the Sun itself, radiating love and light."

It was spring in 1630 when I had been with Ama for over seven years. Ruben, a man who had once been close to Ama, had left her life a year earlier, and I could finally feel the beauty of life flowing through my veins. Through all the struggles, all the challenges, I had learned that love, transformation, and compassion were the true path to enlightenment.

And so, my journey continues.

That day's spring breeze found a mission in destructing my focus, one moment, I stared at the moon, another, observed the cherry blossom, or smelled my favorite rose - Moon.

Ama chanted about her favourite, the secrets of the alchemy of the soul: "Your body is a chariot, horses are thoughts and emotions, and the charioteer is the soul. If the horses lead the journey, the chariot might never move or might take the opposite direction; or if the horses are strained or abused they might die of exhaustion before reaching the destination;"

"If they are let loose they will stop to eat, sleep, they will fight or not care less about the charioteer." I added playfully, following her little comparison.

"Correct, if the chariot (our body) is not in a good condition, it might break during the journey…" I added listening to her giggle.

"Correct, body has to be respected..." She added flirtingly.

"Can I now respect your body?", I leaned to touch her belly. Dancing with words.

"Across the stones and through the deep waters, inevitably breaking my wheels, always cursing God for it…" My hand has disappeared inside her blouse.

"Better ever than never," said Ama. Putting her hand onto my lips, her touch enchanting. This was the closest we have ever been.

"The soul, how do I listen to my soul?" I asked moving a step forward, allowing her to feel my heart-beat.

"But now I wish to explore SeX," I whispered in her ear.

She retreated in a playful game.

To understand my chariot was a life-long task, the task that needed a strong Will Power, so I thought: finally, this one is within my powers, not a problem at all. A merge with Cosmic Love and Cosmic Light, my essence wished to merge with hers for so many

eons. She looked at me, believing in the powers I never knew I had.

"I met many followers and a few leaders and leaders are always worth fighting for," Ama said.

My Warrior of Light, please, from now on, call me Vishnu. It is Light that will transform me, Pure Light.

This Web felt as a living creature difficult to understand and visibly catch.

Knowledge at that time enters freely.

The True Self is cantered in Love.

"Train me Love, my princess, whisper about Love." I demanded. "Talk to me about Being in Love, about the Merge of the Black Queen and White King," Blowing words into her ear.

"Love is supreme, it expands and overcomes boundaries, it melts all it touches." her hips were around mine.

"When I met you, my life changed." My breath caresses her neck.

My arms were now firmly nested inside her dress, I pushed her body close to mine, our blood pulse, our breath became one.

"Love is not something foreign or external," I took Ama taking her shiver into my Being. "God gave us love, but it is not true that He or She has ever taken it away from us. Not true." I moaned. "Remember it…"

Learning how to love I offered a prayer so deeply devout to Her Majesty, to Venus, to the Goddess of the Sea. I offered the prayer like a simple man, waiting for a swift punishment, repentance and I got none, just the deliverance and joy of a newly found child.

My wilful disobedience carried me into the continents where God does not reign, where the crown is on Her Majesty head.

"Do you feel the Love's flame burning our bones," I asked Ama, not letting her move away from the magic of my touch. "Wonderfully warm with full chests, your strong spine, silky skin, your excitement to meet me carried within the scent of roses."

Deep within I knew that Love is the answer to my urge to merge with One.

May the grace of Love of the stars be yours. I kissed her left cheek.

May the grace of Love of the winds be yours. I kissed her right cheek.

May the grace of Love of the waters be yours. I kissed her forehead.

In the name of the World of All Life, Let you become Love. My lips met hers and disappeared within so much expected kiss that took us into a journey around our little planet Earth.

Uplift the heart and feel kisses of stars and breathe of angels upon your body, She is around.

Force and fire, beauty and strength, laughter of delight and souls filled with divine drunkenness, her nature is Love, her blood is immortal divine nectar, Ambrosia that brings eternal life, through Her Beauty the wonder of the Universe opens in front of my eyes, she gives unimaginable joy and to love her is better than all things.

Her body is a palace of which each stone is a separate jewel and I marvel it and worship it, one by one. Her presence is the very light of God and my thoughts are smitten dead before her.

To lie in her bosom, feel her hands, smell her scents, to come to her joy, to love her, to yearn for her, to merge with her, I live. Becoming pure for her, I give, open and dissolve, I befall innocent, transparent, newly born.

Invoking Gods I drink her, love her, disappear in her, for beautiful she is, desirable and in union with her, I enter Understanding.

Rejoicing within the secret temple of her body, eyes burn with desire, for she is Life and Love, our bodies are one, our minds are one, our love is one, Separation becomes Unity.

Yin merges with Yang in the sacred union of a man and a woman. The tiger meets the dragon, water mixes with fire and the woman becomes one with the man dancing in the act of making love. We complete each other and our exchange creates a perfect harmony.

Awakening the original Self I immerse myself within her, she is my guru, I am hers and we are devoted to the eternal joy of bliss.

Becoming one with the great rhythms of nature, free from desires, we both become perfect. The union of Shiva and Shakti release the nectar of purest gold within our bodies and this gold, as radiant as sun is the elixir of immortality. The end of our union is in pure bliss, pure joy.

The Light glows ever brighter, all my senses unsteady, smitten with ecstasy, I am the Lord of Light, Love, and Life, flowering the influence of Sun, staying eternally young, innocent and beautiful, dancing the dance of the creation of the Universe.

Rays from our bodies pierce in every direction inviting the Lady of the Stars to join our dance, we are not each one, nor two merged into one, we are all that was and will be ever created on Earth.

We are, what we are supposed to be all the time, what we are born to be, bright Gods, feeding on delight!

I am not my body any more, I detach observing two bodies completely immersed in their love play. With her hands she held his face, her hair caresses his hands, their lips merged together gently and strong, inseparably, completely tinted with an elixir of love. Their faces mirrored bliss and with every movement they danced extreme love they felt for each other.

Merged in One in the dance of creation, disappearing for the world around them, knowing only the other and this divine ecstasy, her belly button was touching his and her breast were pressed against his chests, her nose against his nose and forehead against each other, in an embrace that lasted eons.

A passer-by, many centuries later saw their materialised image through the Galactic space and time, and in an amazement whisper 'Look at that rock, doesn't it remind you of two lovers merged together.'

Worm and soft were their hands, softer than touch of any silk speaking of adoration, complete giving, absorbed in the love play. She was his and he was hers and they were not in their bodies any more, many became One and One divided into many and they knew, finally they knew, what it is like to be one with God. Flowing, overflowing, disappearing, breaking all known-s to enter into Life pure,

innocent, and without fears, dissolving the limits of time. Two, fused in one, got the power of many, liberated within their own creation.

Expanded beyond this Universe, in Silence and in Screams, they thought each other the mystery of Being.

His erection was strong and he was moving slowly, relaxed and in controlled manner, vitality and energy encircled them and they were spontaneity, naturalness and freedom.

Their hearts beat faster, the faces blush and energy flows in waves, revealing mystical moments of two souls merging together. She became his Highest Priestess and he became her Master and Supreme Lover, they initiated each other in the mysteries of Love.

Finding each other they found what is dearest to their hearts that opens them and inspires them to experience vastness and strength of the most powerful energies of the Universe.

The heat building and rising up the spine to the brain, giving both a sense of bliss. Playing gently, unhurried, resonating perfectly they lived within the beauty of their merge. After hours of this perfect Unity where Will is no more and breath becomes like the one of a baby within a womb, they became Immortal.

She as a cosmic creative force of birth and re-newel, receiving his energy, his fire, his strength, openly and lovingly, closing the circle between the two, Yin and Yang of the Universe.

Subtle as Earth, imperceptible as Water, bright as Fire, free as Air, infinite as Space we became One. Transcending all elements belonging to this world, helping metals become its higher self, become gold, speeding the time, moving through the space, achieving immortality within the merge of two.

It was two years after our first merge when Fra Thomas visited us on his personal mission to arrest Ama, accusing her of witchcraft.

Among the many books in Ama's household, I came across one that you all have already heard of: The Hammer of Witches. It was the witch hunter's manual, detailing in grim precision the methods used to torture the accused. I remember one passage vividly, describing the process of beginning an examination by torture:

"First, the jailers prepare the implements of torture, then they strip the prisoner (if it be a woman, she has already been stripped by other women, upright and of good report). And when the implements of torture have been prepared, the judge, both in person and through other good men zealous in the faith, tries to persuade the prisoner to confess the truth freely; but, if she will not confess, he bids attendants make the prisoner fast to the straps or

some other implement of torture. And, while she is being tortured, she must be questioned on the articles of accusation, and this frequently and persistently, beginning with the lighter charges—for she will more readily confess to the lighter than the heavier. But if the prisoner will not confess the truth satisfactorily, other sorts of tortures must be placed before her, with the statement that unless she will confess the truth, she must endure these also. But, if not even thus can she be brought to terror and to the truth, then the next day or the next but one is to be set for a continuation of the tortures — not a repetition, for it must not be repeated unless new evidence is produced."

Ama had warned me about Fra Thomas.

He was never one of my favourites. He always reminded me of a headless chicken, running in circles, still believing its world was the world of the living.

That day, he came to arrest Ama, and Ama — my love, my soul-mate — did not allow me to interfere.

I could have smashed him like a fly, with a single strike of my palm against the wall. I could have thrown him out and waited for him to return with many more men, all claiming they had the authority to arrest, torture, or kill the innocent. I could have waited for them all, ready to give my life for Ama if she only allowed me to do so.

But the evening before Fra Thomas came to our house, Ama told me of the task I had in this lifetime.

"You have to," she said gently, "rebuild the Web you carefully constructed in your previous life. The life of a murderer, a life of someone who does not like people, who can kill and hurt others without hesitation."

She paused, looking deep into my eyes. "The key to all of your efforts is in changing this Web through non-violence. The violence that has been bred into your being from the very beginning of your journey on this little blue planet is woven into this Web—the violence that runs through our religious upbringing. Your task now is to act differently, to uproot this violent behaviour from your personal Web."

I took in her words, the weight of them pressing on my chest. The Web, the very essence of who I had been, was tangled with violence. But now, I had to change it, to transform the violence into peace, to learn how to live without it.

"What you need to understand," Ama continued softly, "is that you're not just rebuilding your Web. You are rebuilding the Web of your ancestors, your family, your neighbours, your surroundings, and your offspring. The Web of the whole world, with its core within the militant and insensitive."

My personal war against my negative conditioning had grown into a larger battle—against humankind's

deep-seated belief that killing is justified if the cause is seen as just.

Ama took me aside, her voice a whisper. "Promise me, you will not, under any circumstances, return to the world of killing. A warrior takes responsibility for his actions, and the intent of not killing is so very important. By keeping this promise, you will also help change the world around you. The world is thirsting for violence. If you hold to this, you will help humankind free itself from the hunger for bloodshed."

Fra Thomas wanted to take her that evening—to imprison her, to torture her, with the wish to ultimately kill her. I was there, watching this little man, and I could feel the powerful impulse guiding my being: This time, it is right to kill!

All these years Ama trusted me. She trusted my Light and left me to develop within the glow of Her enlightened being. Now she needed my response, to save her meant going back to the Web, to save her meant I would betray her guidelines, break the promise, jump out of the Path, go back to the violence, and all of my being wanted to so -: go back to the violence! My Soul was bouncing in a dance of opposites, in a dance of white and black. God sent me Fra Thomas, the temptation too difficult to face.

Coming out of the room hearing his words of the arrest with only one thought: I am here to save you

my love, I will not see any authorities torture you, I don't give a damn about the Web, I will change your destiny, the world does not need such beautiful martyrs. With a simple wrist movement, Fra Thomas will no longer belong to the Land of Living, he will go to Hell, where he belonged to. Soon, I might follow him there too. In fact, if we meet again, up there, me and Fra Thomas, in the midst of the fire, I will still chase him and kill him if he even dreams of hurting you. She was more precious than all the eternity of Hell. I had no doubts, determined in the righteousness of my act!

Within the next scene that unfolded in front of me, Ama stood a few centimetres away from me. Our motion slowed down as though somebody touched us all with the magic wand. I could feel myself losing the power, feeling my legs becoming heavier.

She raised her hand and the silk of her dress rubbed against my cheek, she touched me in between my eyes and this touch was the last one I could remember. Within seconds everything ceased to be, unfolding the secret of my Life. I saw a point of dense, brilliant light growing brighter and stronger in the centre of the dark that surrounded me.

The light was coming from the centre of the earth, entering my body as a breath of fire. My spine, my bones, the skull, jaw, and teeth, my muscles, they were all shaking, receiving this divine flow. The divine energy was entering my system forcefully, with great power expanding. The energy was coming down from the sun, moon, planets, and it was bright

and luminous, powerful and warm. Lost within this expanding consciousness, within love, within this living golden fire I saw a vision, a woman of an indescribable beauty.

"A Warrior chooses his path and he follows it unconditionally," Ama said. "Un-conditionally…"

This was the day of my final transformation.

There was no person on Earth that I had trusted and loved more dearly than Ama, there was no person whose opinion meant more to me than hers. Ama gave me a chance to understand the difference between human love and Divine Love, a chance to bring this experience to the Web of Humankind.

I am since long dead but my eyes stay fixed on this little blue planet just in case She decides to return, sheltered by Her wisdom, I might be able to surrender to Her path to its very end.

‘However much we have drifted on the ocean of suffering,
today we see clearly that there is a beautiful path.
We turn toward the light of loving kindness
to direct us.’
Anonymous

Lilith

As long as the belief is: we need suffering to grow, the world will be suffering and the belief will be limiting

All through human existence you have faithfully worshiped me and my powers, worshiping your own weaknesses. Stronger your limitations, stronger the manifestation of my powers.

All through human existence you carefully collected the dust of my feet and distributed it among yourselves, whispering stories of my victories, feeding on the grossest parts of my reality.

All through human existence you adored me and evoked my presence addicted to my being, my shrouds of secrets, and shadows.

Only a few manage to turn away from my gaze and look at the light that lives around me. As a gate-keeper of the worlds of darkness. I exist within your minds and am worshiped more than any other God.

Where there is Life, and there is Consciousness, I exist.

My name is Lilith, and I am Adam's first wife and was thrown out of Paradise because I refused to surrender to him. Refusing to live with Adam, I chose a life with demons, with whom I have innumerable children. God sent his angels to find me

and with them a punishment, one hundred of my children were killed each day. This made me mad with grief and that is when I have decided to retrieve into the shadows of your minds.

Like my sister, Kali, the black Indian Goddess who drinks the blood of her victims and wears human heads around her neck, I also wear a terrible mask of suffering and Death. I am otherwise known as Black Moon, the one that creates and destroys Life, the raw, untamed, murky secret of your own nature, the suppressed, shadow-side of your personality, your deep desire to separate from God and live in my embrace, suffering.

Facing me is not easy, because I awaken within you all your fears, the dark becomes darker and your demons multiply, shaking the very essence of who you are, who you were and who you would like to be.

If you feel doubt, withdraw, if you feel insecure, withdraw! Facing me, understanding me, to finally detach from my powers, is the road of the Warriors and only the Determined will have an access to it. This is the road of the few.

To discover me, you will need to put away the idea of two and be of one body, entering into the road of your hidden nature, the nature that worships Suffering.

The rhythm that led to Her was hypnotic, Ruben felt it within his bones, magical, it was the rhythm of his dreams. As in a dream, hearing drums in the background, feeling secure and loved for the last time, feeling sorrow creeping into my heart, knowing that the time has come to enter a different world, the world so well-known and yet so mysterious, she invited me to step forward and enter the greatest mystery of the human existence, Her world, the world of Lilith.

To take you away from familiar faces, familiar sounds, touches of console, and the remembrance that you are not alone, that is my mission. In my world, Light will disappear. On this journey, you will become one with others vibrating bodies, your brothers and sisters in sorrow, you will merge with them. Prepare to receive the energy of fear and awakening, of burning tension of final initiation.

To learn the secret, you will become one with men living around you, now and 100s of years ago and 1000s of years ago, one with their lives, with their sufferings, with their fears.

I was waiting for you, so many years, with the cup that you called for, so that you could get to know the bottom, get to know me, Black Moon, Black Mother, Lilith.

Let’s enter into my stage and peek into one of Many heads.

The name you know, it is Ruben! Step forth so all could see.

The only thing he knew is that he was surrounded with clouds of despair, experiencing the end of his worlds. He was within, what he called 'his body', at the edge of a cliff, above the sea, wanting to die.

And even though he was experiencing misery, desolation, hopelessness, he felt one with the beings around him. Thoughts, worries, life with its past, future and present, everything disappeared. He was a part of one body that danced in a circle finding its cause, moving towards the end of life and creation, going back to the beginning, to its Creator.

Put away the idea of Many and be of one body!

Drink from my essence, from the very source of pain, from the cup that is specially prepared for you, Ruben, carefully taking care of your-own weaknesses.

Ruben listened to the wind hauling through the cliffs and he heard Ama's voice breaking through his storm and there was Aum in Her voice. 'You are now on-your-own!

He looked around his-isolated-mind and he took Lilith in, seeing people around, familiar faces and strangers, looking, as though they know him, each one with a different experience of the same

suffering, each one with a wound that still needs healing.

Within my nightmare I got surrounded by abandoned babies, separated lovers, abused children, bruised mothers, liars, murderers, sickness, broken bodies, refugees, burnt houses, miscarriages and loses, Death in Her many forms, surrounded by pain, pain everywhere, from the very beginning of time, to its very end.

My tremble entered the space of no shame and no return, I became one with Many that surround me, one with you that so much hope that you will escape from this bitter cup.

I was a baby almost choked to death by its umbilical cord and the words whispered to me were 'Fight or you will die, breathe or this will be your last breath, you are alone.!'

Their dreams pulsated for a moment, disappearing, dissolving fast as though they have never existed, and she caught his hands, looked deep into his eyes and heard him speak about love that will last forever.

The world had stopped.

In the middle of her pain, I was left alone.

Why couldn't we be together? Zeus split lovers in half, condemning them to spend their lives searching

for the other half. I found mine only to leave it, embarking on another endless search.

Is it not possible to relive everything from the beginning, to stop time, change the place, reconstruct the end? If we are destined for each other, why can't we just be together?

I observe this strange game. I, Ruben, once the preacher, philosopher, leader—someone who could offer endless spiritual advice in his youth and guide the masses through their suffering—now had to place my own life on Lilith's stage. I had to place my own heart beneath the grinding wheel, entering the endless circle of suffering with her.

Led to despair in this test, I screamed, feeling the boundaries of my own skin break. I screamed, trying to be heard in a world of faceless people, walking through the Earth unaware of one another. My scream was silent, tearing apart my insides. Death no longer scared me—it was the emptiness of life.

The question "Why me?" is irrelevant. It is for the weak—those who lack the wisdom to see the universality of this wild, painful feeling.

Diving deeper into my fixation with separateness, into my own scream, I saw myself at five, at twenty, at forty, hundreds of years ago, and far down the path of the future. God was always there, and She, Lilith, was always there.

My mother stood by the window every morning, gazing at a house across the river, wishing she could be part of it. She dreamed and prayed for a new life that would bring her happiness. I saw her wish come true when she moved into my father's house. But there she was again, standing by the window of her new home, looking at the old house every single day, wishing for the past: I wish I could go back to the house across the river where I was happy.

I saw my father, madly in love, willing to kill and die for the one he loved. But every time she gave him her heart completely, he left her. I saw him suffering in loneliness, surrounded by strangers, starved for love.

I saw lovers who were not meant to be together— separated by family, distance, age, class, or torn apart by war, poverty, disease. And I saw them die of broken hearts.

In the midst of this play — this theatre of my own making — the scenario continued, with an endless number of roles. As long as the belief persists that we need suffering to grow, the world will remain in suffering, and that belief will continue to limit us.

I stumbled in despair, searching for her in the branches of the trees hanging over the cliff, asking: Why? Why suffering? My misery needed an answer.

This was no mistake, no coincidence. God, as a perfect conductor, created Lilith for a reason.

The vision returned to haunt me. This time, I was in my own body, sometime in the future. Inside, there were only broken bones. There had been nothing before, and there would be nothing after this feeling of profound sadness. Lilith's voice echoed.

My face disappeared in the white mist. I was a dead man walking, my head in my hands, wondering why everyone was looking at me. I was walking pain.

"You are the man who once had everything," Lilith said. A warm home. An exciting mission. A powerful church. Your friends. Your loved one. They all disappeared, all at once.

I turned around, and I thought I heard God laughing.

If I wanted money, I got it — piles of it. If I wanted power, people were at my feet, wanting my approval, wanting me to bless them, wanting me to smile. If I wanted love, I received the most amazing woman who fell in love with me. If I wanted knowledge, it flowed into my mind to excite my followers. I had everything and the freedom to choose. All my life, I had the freedom to choose…

But my soul was in pain.

Today, with no love, no friends, no mission, no future to call my own, I heard my thoughts echoing through the valley.

The same people who once admired me now despised me. Walking alone through the mazes of unknown streets, lost in thought, I searched for the meaning of life.

Belief in God offered no comfort. Why? Why would a soul choose a life of separation? Why must we constantly return to suffering?

Suddenly, a child was trapped inside me, crying. My heart bled as I listened to its screams. The little one was hurt, and there was nothing I could do to stop its anguish. The rain within my heart smelled of fear. You all must be familiar with the sound of a child crying—the kind of cry that is complete, frantic, devoted to its core. It expresses the pain of all humanity. The cause is lost, the reason gone, and only the cry remains—mingling with the screams of all of us, unconscious in our suffering.

"Shhhhhh, my dear one…" some tried to console it. "Shhhhhh." Gentle whispers: "Shhhhhh, our loved one, shhhhhh, calm down. We'll secure your little body, calm your little mind, protect you from the evil and the fears of the world." But it was all for nothing. The child's cry went on for hours. Hours…

After the crying stopped, I bowed to the child within me. It needed that cry to be drowned in the spheres of the unassuming. Now, I understood. The human need for suffering is very deep. I meditated, and realized: the human need to love is just as deep.

Love gives, just as a flower gives its fragrance to the world — completely, unassuming, unconditionally. Ama danced through her game of love, singing. But now, with Ama gone, just a thought of her name brought sharp physical pain.

A thought crept into my mind—a thought planted within me all these years of priesthood: Pain is not useless. It has its purpose. You chose to leave the Garden of Eden. Life there was too easy, too comfortable. You were not alert.

Shaking off this thought, I could almost hear Ama laughing at these words: "And your understanding grows deeper and deeper, but it is still so very childlike…"

"Stop the dance for a moment," I pleaded.

"When you stop the dance, a miracle happens: you enter the sound of Silence, and the pain disappears."

Shaken from my dream-like state, I observed my little stage. Pain had become my constant companion, always seeking attention, appearing and disappearing, becoming the center of my illusion whenever I allowed it to be.

Suffering, I thought, teaches us compassion. But I wasn't sure if these were my thoughts or those of humankind, who knows no other way.

Within the sound of waves breaking beneath my feet, I could hear Ama laughing again. These were words of Ruben, comforting his flock.

But there must be another way, I screamed into the void.

When did all of this begin? I can't see the end of it, but there must have been a beginning!

A bird flitted from my sight, carrying with it a thought of suffering that had been with me since the beginning of time.

"The moment has never happened," I heard Ama. "It is all an illusion—its birth, its existence, its reality. All of it is in your head."

Clinging to my imaginary conversation with Ama—my only sane refuge within the alley of my misery—I dove deeper into it, with the spark of hope flickering like a thirsty man confronting Medusa's deadly glow.

"You were in love with me yesterday, you are in pain today, and you will not remember me tomorrow."

"I will always remember you," I insisted, halting her.

"Don't say 'always,'" she replied. "Always doesn't exist."

“Always. Always. Always,” I repeated, my little mantra.

Nothing is static, she said. “You are an endless combination of thoughts, feelings, cells. In reality, without a static 'you,' we only have a series of memories implanted in your brain.”

“Will you remember me?” I pressed.

“If I paint your image and frame it, the reality of that image will be gone before you even fully recognize its existence.”

“You’re being cruel to me!” I stopped her. “Is that because I left you?”

“You live in your past and in the imagined future you will never have. These two versions of yourself are not real.” Ama was right.

She wiped away a tear rolling down my cheek, releasing it into the crack of a stone where it would form a crystal millions of years later, hiding the story of my lost and never-to-be-found love.

She took my hand and led me on a journey into my past. “Come with me now into the narrow streets of Macao, where we contemplate Life and our original sin: the separation from God. Come with me into the mind of a young Ruben, the priest who had just moved to China, decades ago — before he fell in love and before he left his beloved.”

"Come with me into your past, hoping to find the key, to avoid my bitter cup in future lives. Enter his story once again, but be aware that we could be a part of any man's life, any century, any place—walking the path toward Truth."

I saw a bird that had fallen from its nest, just born, beautiful in its fragility, only to die beneath a tree, right before my eyes. It died… Giving birth, being born—it's painful. Aging and decaying surround us, nature is cruel.

Ruben smelled the air, feeling the spring in his lungs. He felt the first rays of the sun caress his forehead.

"Does the grass know it is dying? Does a bird suffer when its baby falls from the nest?" We humans give so much more weight to these things than any other living being.

Being conscious of how temporary life is, we suffer, Ruben thought.

We all go through the same motions: birth, growth, the desire to procreate, the wish to socialize, decay, death. The only thing that separates us from other living beings on this little planet is that we are conscious of what is happening to us. We are conscious of Life's game, of the eternal spiral—and this awareness causes us pain. Yet, it is the same consciousness that drives our search for higher meaning in life.

This consciousness also gives us the strength to continue our journey.

Ruben took the fragile body of the bird into his hands, creating a little tomb for it. Its body still looked perfect, a mirroring of the miracle of Life.

As he buried the small bones, covered in feathers, he blessed it with leaves, leaving only a few traces of human interaction with Nature. The wind would soon disperse those traces, returning everything to perfect balance. Death would, in time, become invisible to the eyes of passers-by.

"We all dance on this stage, within Life," thought Ruben, still kneeling after his little funeral. "And while we dance, we seek to understand this web of energies. Is this the essence of our work? Understanding Life and Death?"

Looking up through the trees, into the clouds, he couldn't help but feel that someone was watching, attentively.

Ever desire-less, one can see the mystery
Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations

Tao Te Ching

The air smelled of pine. The cool breeze kissed my skin as the moon gazed down at me, speaking in signs. Lost in the movement of the night, I sought the End, looking inward…

Alone, even in the presence of others, I walked through the dream of Life.

Dressed in white, with a transparent body of Light, a vision appeared before me—my enlightenment. A wind trailed behind Her, a subtle, gentle force. She was the Master of the surrounding waters. She took my heart — once painfully ensnared by my mind— and now, it was freed, re-birthing in joy, filled with strength and beauty.

A sign appeared on my forehead, marking me apart from the islands of man. It carried both the question and the answer, shining like a star—indicating the beginning and the end of the journey.

She spoke: "At the beginning, there was a word, a sound. God was that sound.

Sound was vibration, and vibration was energy.

Life chose to move away from God.

God chose to create Life.

And thus, it all began to materialize, here on Earth.

Cells, living organisms, grass, trees, enlightened trees, ancient ones who conquered death and lived for thousands of years.

Cells, living organisms, evolving into animals, then humans — who, through consciousness, try to break the circle of life and death."

Identifying with separateness created an illusion of division, isolating us from Life.

Consciousness opened our eyes to suffering, creating a path for accelerated growth and an unrelenting desire to break the cycle and merge with God — now.

From stone to stone, my walk became a run. Orion smiled at me from above, though the visibility was low. Confidence built within me, protected by the stars and the moonlight veiled behind a distant cloud. The spirits of Water, Stone, and Wind accompanied me. The strength of Earth supported me, and the sounds and whispers of the night guided me.

Soon, a little goat within me found its way, trusting its own steps. From stone to stone, breath by breath, I moved closer to the sea. I leapt over water pools, avoided cracks, crossed paths with animals, and passed worlds unknown caves of damp darkness walking the edge, ever closer to the sea.

Through my journey, the call remained clear, coming from the depths of the waters: Merge with One!

"We know you. We belong to the same gap in Time. Our heartbeat connects with yours. You are given the chance to sail the wave of our truth and move the boundaries between two realities. You've witnessed the birth of Venus, the crystal-white foam emerging from the depths of the sea. Through stone and wind, the shell appeared, carrying the beauty of the pearl hidden within. Opening to you, revealing secrets of birth and death, it unfolded in golden transformation."

Between reality and dreams, there existed a world where I trusted Orion and the Earth, carried over the rocks into that space of altered reality. Merged with Life, I understood the powers within me.

The Sea had given me its code—blue and endless—it surrounded me, entered my core, running through my blood, spiraling beneath my skin, moving within my cells. It gave me the ability to become it. I could now communicate with Life, understanding its movements, its breathing, the process of evolution, the emergence of cells, and the cycle of growth.

Entering the Lotus of Heart, still in trance, I experienced minutes as hours, days as eons. And then, I heard Her voice:

"May the clarity of my vision guide you, for I am a part of you.

May my breath become your breath and fill you with Life.

May my words find a place of truth within your heart.

Allow my love to enter your body as the gift of Life.

May you become this most precious gift: your Divine Nature.

Through our time together, may you know Yourself.

In that knowing, may you find your true home — the God within."

Finally, alone, with no roles left to play, I was the loneliest person on Earth and yet, completely fulfilled.

At the very beginning of my journey.

She was with me many times since — guiding my soul gently and firmly, always drawing me closer to the One.

Five years later, sitting around the fire on a cold winter's night, I heard a story that best described Her nature. Her name was Nirvana.

"Is there such a thing as wind?"

"Of course," came the reply.

"What is its colour, its shape, its thickness?"

"It has no colour, no shape, no thickness."

"Can one touch it? Can it be shown?"

"No, it cannot be touched or shown."

"If it cannot be shown, how do you know it exists?"

"I am positive it exists, even if it cannot be seen. Nirvana is like that. It cannot be touched or seen, but we are certain it exists."

The last time I saw Her was the night before I died. Once again, in my dream, She came to visit. Compassion personified. My mission on Earth was fulfilled, and I was ready to leave this realm—realized and at peace.

V.I.T.R.I.O.L.

Visita
Interiora
Terrae
Ractificando
Invenies
Occultum

Lapidem

Visita Interiora Terrae Ractificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem

Fire, Water, and Air.

Being, Knowledge, and Bliss.

Sulphur is a male fiery manifestation of the Universe, it is activity, desire, the Rajas that is seen as energy, excitement, fire, brilliance, restlessness, the swift and creative, it is the initiative of all Being. It represents sudden and violent but impermanent activity. If it persists for too long, it will burn and destroy.

Mercury is fluidity, intelligence and power of transmission, it is the energy sent forth. Represents the Wisdom, the Will, the Word of creation whose speech is silence, it is Satva that is calm, intelligence and balance. It represents creation in all forms. Unexpected, he unsettles any established idea.

Salt is the vehicle of two forms of energy. The formula of our Universe is Love governed by Venus. She combines the highest spiritual with the lowest material qualities – Love materialised on Earth. Born in water, from mud, she bears the lotus. Salt is inactive principle of Nature and it is seen as Tamas – darkness, inertia, sloth, ignorance, death. It is matter that must be energised by Sulphur to maintain the equilibrium.

Life has emerged as an interplay of the three elements and as such is in a state of continuous change. Nothing can remain in any phase where one state is predominant. Three elements flow into each other, reward of an effort is peace that ultimately sinks into the original inertia.

In the process of creation, the Black King is marrying the White Queen, the male and the female principle in Nature are merging. The energy sent forth through the Will, is penetrating the female aspects of the Universe to create Life. The formulation of any idea creates its opposite and this preserves the equilibrium of the Universe. The opposites are equal and they manifest in various forms, Sun and Moon, Light and Darkness, Fire and Water, Air and Earth, Spirit and Soul. The result of the marriage is the Orphic egg that is the essence of Life – the colour of egg is grey. It is capable of taking any possible form.

Any Thought merging from Life becomes a Separation and it can be balanced if it is married with its Contradiction. The merge brings equilibrium, the white woman now has a black head, the black king a white one, the fire burns up the water and the water extinguish the fire to be harmoniously mingled at the end. Below the Abyss, contradiction is division, but above the Abyss, contradiction is Unity.

The formula of continued life is death. The formula of ascending above the Abyss is resurrection.

In the process of transformation the life form from the Orphic egg has to die to be reborn again.

The spirit, as mighty fire descends and connects itself with now completely purified soul giving re-birth to the divine man. The King and the Queen are resurrected to give a birth to the new body. The merge, this time, led by conscious effort, brings love and joy into heart of man, creating the light that will destroy and re-create the world.

Within the earth's womb each metal grows slowly developing and transforming into its perfection, its highest manifestation – gold. Nature and God are striving towards perfection, everything moves towards One. Just as human strive to become fully conscious, so all the metals strive to reach their purest state – gold.

Gold by its nature does not rot or decay and that is why it is the most precious. Gold is not receptive to oxygen that is breath of life for living organisms.

Visita interiora terrae ractificando invenies occultum lapidem.

Visit the interior parts of the Earth: by rectification you shall find the hidden stone.

V.I.T.R.I.O.L. is a balanced combination of the three alchemical principles, Sulphur, Mercury and Salt.

Through the rectification the new life is created.

Through the rectification Spirit and Soul merge creating a new body, a new divine personality.

Through the rectification life is correctly led in the path of the True Will. Love is the law, Love controlled by Will.

Through the rectification True Will springs from within as a fountain of Light and the flow of Love leads into the Ocean of Life.

Through the rectification action brings Perfection that is Silence and every form of energy is directed, applied with integrity to the full satisfaction of its destiny.

when a particle and antiparticle touch
they both disappear in a burst
of gamma radiation
that generates huge amount of energy...
can this be Love?

Nuit

About the Author

Nataša Pantović

MSc Economics, Maltese-Serbian Novelist, Adoptive Parent, Management Consultant, and Ancient Worlds' Consciousness Researcher.

Drawing inspiration from the stories of ancient Greek and Egyptian philosophers and artists, Nataša Pantović combines her extensive experience in business development with a passion for consciousness exploration. With over 20 years of experience as a Head of Business Development, Consultant, and Trainer for some of the largest consulting and IT companies in the UK, Holland, and Malta — including KPMG, Reeds, Deloitte, and government organizations — Nataša now uses her expertise to inspire others to push beyond their self-imposed boundaries.

Her journey as a volunteer has been equally inspiring. She has organized six large Body, Mind, and Spirit Festivals, participated in panels for the International Vegetarian Festival, and hosted a 10-day conference on Neolithic Temples. Additionally, Nataša has represented Malta's IT outsourcing efforts on the global stage.

As a published author since 1991, Nataša's first work, a legal book on Co-operatives, was published in Serbia. Her philanthropic work includes helping build a school in a remote village in Ethiopia. She later adopted two children as a single mother, and her journey is truly an inspiring and unconventional story.

Nataša is the author and co-author of several books, both fiction and non-fiction. Some of her works include:

Fiction and Non-Fiction Works (AoL Mindfulness Series):

A-Ma Alchemy of Love (AoL Mindfulness 1)
Art of 4 Elements: Discover Alchemy through Poetry (AoL Mindfulness 2) with Jeni Caruana, Jason Lu, and Christine Cutajar.
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